

WILD WEST WEEKLY.

5 Cents



YOUNG WILD WEST OR ARIETTA AND THE ESCAPING A CROSS FIRE FLAG OF TRUCE
By An Old Scout
AND OTHER STORIES



"Come back, Et!" shouted Wild, as he ran down the bank. The girl heard him, and quickly reining in her horse, she turned and galloped back. The baffled villains fired a volley.

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Young Wild West Escaping a Cross-Fire

OR,

ARIETTA AND THE FLAG OF TRUCE

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

THE CAMP IN THE GLEN

Camped in a little glen at the foot of the steep mountain-side, in the southeastern part of Arizona, were eight persons. The sun had set and the shades of night were quickly gathering.

The high cliffs that reared themselves on almost every hand looked somber and ghostly, while here and there a bush could be seen that took on the appearance of grim sentinels guarding the silent scene.

Those in the camp did not notice these things at all. They were merry, and the frequent bursts of laughter that went up told plainly that they were not given to studying nature on the gloomy side.

Without getting descriptive, or going into detail, we will state that the party consisted of Young Wild West and the friends who traveled with him on his long horseback rides in search of excitement and adventure.

A few years ago, when law and order had not thoroughly been established in all the region known as the Wild West, Young Wild West was the recognized Champion Deadshot of the West, as well as the ideal Hero of the American boys.

It happened that Wild, as he was called for short, had decided to ride down as far as the Mexican border, and as we find him in camp the distance to the Mexican line was something like a hundred miles.

The boy's two reliable partners, Cheyenne Charlie, the scout, and Jim Dart, a Wyoming boy of about his own age, always agreed with anything he said, so there was never the least bit of an argument as to where they should go.

Wing Wah, the Chinese cook, was busy preparing the supper, and while they were waiting for it the young deadshot and his two partners walked a short distance out of the glen and looked up and down the ravine.

"Well, it don't look much as though we're going to be disturbed to-night, boys," Young Wild West observed, as he nodded to Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

"I reckon not, Wild," the scout answered, quickly, while Dart remained silent and looked down the ravine. "But yer can't never tell. We ain't seen ther least sign of a human bein' all day long. But that's 'cause we've been in a putty wild part of ther mountains, I s'pose. When we struck ther trail an hour ago I thought maybe we would run across a minin' camp, or maybe a ranch. Sometimes cattle is found up in these hills, an' now an' then a man what don't know much about ther business starts a ranch."

"Just below here ought to be a pretty good grazing region, considering that we are in Arizona," the young deadshot ob-

served, as he pointed to the south. "It isn't all a barren waste that it makes a feller almost forgit ther rest of it."

"You have got that just about right, Charlie," Jim Dart observed, with a laugh. "But surely there are some beautiful places in Arizona."

"Well, this ain't exactly one of 'em, though some folks might call it mighty fine scenery here," and the scout swung his hand toward the cliffs which showed up in the deepening shadows.

"What are you folks talking about?" and just then Anna, Cheyenne Charlie's wife, came from behind a clump of rocks at the edge of the glen and looked at them smilingly. "I thought I heard Charlie talking about the fine scenery."

"That's all right, gal," the scout retorted, shrugging his shoulders and grinning broadly. "But I wasn't admirin' it, though. I was jest sayin' that some folks would call it that."

"Well, they would be perfectly right in doing so, too, I think."

"Most likely you're right, gal. You know more about sich things than I do, though I s'pose I've seen more scenery than you have. But I never paid no attention ter it, so what good did it do me? What's ther use of botherin' your head about sich things, anyhow? There's too much ter do in this world without lookin' at things that don't amount ter nothin'."

"Yes, I know what you mean. You're so much like Wild and Jim in that way that I suppose the three of you are about even up. You're all never satisfied unless you are getting into some kind of danger."

At this juncture two young girls appeared on the scene.

They were Arietta Murdock, Young Wild West's golden-haired sweetheart, and dark-eyed Eloise Gardner, the sweetheart of Jim Dart.

"Quite an interesting conversation, I must say," Arietta remarked. "Admiring the beauties of nature? Well, those rocky cliffs do look grand, to say the least."

"To me they seem forbidding and awesome," declared Eloise, with something like a shiver. "The white patches of rock that are to be seen on them make it appear as though ghosts inhabited the ravine."

"Well, I reckon there are no ghosts here," Dart hastened to say, as he stepped to her side. "You are still very timid, Eloise. By this time you should be more like Arietta. Anna is fast getting that way, I have noticed."

"Well, I suppose it's my nature to be rather timid, Jim," and the girl laughed lightly. "But you will agree with me when I say that I have learned how to handle a rifle pretty well, and I can shoot good with a gun, too."

"How does that strike you?" said Young Wild West, as he stepped to them. "Now then, I reckon you won't accuse Eloise of being timid any more. You know what she did when we

were hounded in by redskins a few months ago. She kept right on firing, and I am certain that the most of her bullets took effect, too. Eloise is all right. She is a regular Western girl now, even if she was not born and bred here."

"If that is the case, I must be a regular Western girl, too, Wild," the scout's wife spoke up, with a laugh.

"That's right, Anna. Though you are married and somewhat older than Eloise and Arietta, you are only a girl. Anyhow, we always called the three of you the girls, and we are going to continue to do it, too."

"Everybody allee samee comee to suppee," a voice called out close at hand. "My fool blother allee samee say evelything joddy now. Hip hi! Hoolay! Me velly hungry, and me wantee some of Misler Charlie's bear-meat."

The speaker was Hop Wah, who, as most of our readers know, was called Young Wild West's clever Chinee, because he was considerable of a magician, and was always ready to play a practical joke.

He and Wing Wah were brothers, but they were entirely unlike in their dispositions.

The cook had a way of minding his own business and remaining quiet, while Hop was always looking for a chance to stir things up, and make all the fun he could.

There was not one in the party who was not hungry just then, for they had waited until sunset before going into camp.

What they had been looking for was water, and when they found it in the glen they decided to go no further.

It certainly was not only a cosy place to camp for the night, but was well protected in case of an attack from enemies.

Young Wild West and his friends had plenty of enemies, as might be supposed, for they always made it a point to punish wrong-doers and assist those who were in need of it.

Of course they made many friends, too, but where a person makes friends he generally makes enemies, too.

They all walked back to the camp.

The blazing fire shed out sufficient light for them all to see, but in addition a lantern hung suspended from the branch of a tree overhead.

The two tents, which were used for sleeping purposes, were erected close under the cliff, and the horses were tied along the bank of the little stream, where mesquite grew in abundance, and here and there a few tufts of luxuriant grass showed themselves.

This was all good fodder for the animals, and they were at this moment making the best of it, for their munching could be heard distinctly.

Cheyenne Charlie had shot a young bear early that morning, and he insisted on having some of the meat broiled for supper.

With a few partridges, some baked potatoes and hot corn muffins and coffee, they were quite likely to make a good meal.

But Young Wild West and his friends were always pretty well fed, since they saw to it every time they came to a town or mining camp or settlement to stock up with what they needed in the way of provisions.

All but the two Chinamen were good shots, so it was a foregone conclusion that they would keep themselves supplied with game.

The cook moved about swiftly now, and passed out the portions of the food he had prepared to those who were waiting for it.

Hop was supplied last, but he got just as good as the rest, and then Wing filled the tin cups with coffee and passed them around.

The meal proceeded, the girls talking merrily and everyone quite happy, for the life they led in the open air was bound to make them cheerful, especially when they had all they wanted to eat.

By the time the supper was finished the fire had died down so much that there was not much light coming from it.

"Hop," said Wild, as he arose to his feet, "I reckon you had better light another lantern. It makes it seem more pleasant to have plenty of light."

"Allee light, Misler Wild," and the clever Chinee was not long in doing what he was told.

"Now then, I reckon we will take it easy for a while, and then I am going to turn in," the young deadshot declared, as he sat down upon a rock and lighted a cigar.

While the boy never smoked cigarettes, he occasionally did try a cigar, and as he had a few that had been purchased at the last mining camp they had stopped at he passed them to Charlie and Jim.

"Me likee smokee, too, so be, Misler Wild," Hop Wah observed, with a bland smile, as he stepped up.

"Well, if you haven't got such a thing as a cigar on your person I will gladly give you one, Hop. But I think you are generally well supplied."

"Lat light, Misler Wild. Me no wantee you cigar. Me gottee plenty, so be. Me gottee some me makee myself. Ley allee samee gottee plenty powdee in. Makee bigee bang when somebody smokee lem."

"Well, you can smoke one of them, if you like. We don't care how much of a bang it makes."

"Lat allee light, Misler Wild. Me no smokee um cigar with powdee in. Me gottee nicee Mexican cigar. Allee samee velly blackee."

"Well, you kin smoke them things, if you like, Hop," the scout observed, "but I ain't got no use for a genuine Mexican cigar. These what we've got ter pay half a dollar apiece for sometimes ain't nothin' extra, but when yer git one of them Mexican cheroots they're enough ter knock yer down."

The Chinaman produced one of the identical cigars the scout spoke of, and lighting it he sat down near them and began puffing away as though he thoroughly enjoyed it.

The odor of the smoke that came from it was not at all bad, though rather strong.

But Hop was used to that sort of thing.

He liked strong cigars, and he also had a great fondness for whisky, which he invariably called tanglefoot.

Another failing he was possessed of was that he was an inveterate gambler, and that he would always cheat, even though there was really no necessity for doing it.

Of course he won considerable money, but it was mostly from card sharps who picked him up for an easy victim.

Being a sleight of hand performer, it was really easy for him to handle a pack of cards the way he liked, and thus it was that the best of the card sharps stood little chance with him when he made up his mind to win.

They had been sitting there probably ten minutes when suddenly the clatter of hoofs sounded near at hand.

"Hello!" exclaimed Young Wild West, leaping to his feet. "Charlie, I reckon I was mistaken in thinking that we would not be disturbed to-night. Someone is coming, and by the sounds I should say there are at least half a dozen in the party."

"It sounds that way, Wild," the scout retorted, as he stepped after the boy, who had already started out of the glen.

As they walked around the rocks that almost hid their camp from the view of anyone who might be passing through the ravine, they saw the outlines of a party of horsemen just as they came to a halt.

No doubt the light from the lantern had been seen, and the strangers were curious to know who was there.

"Hello, strangers!" Young Wild West called out, in the cool and easy way he was famous for. "Surprised to find somebody here, I reckon."

"That's right," came the reply, and then one of the horsemen rode forward and met our hero and the scout.

Though it was pretty dark, the two were able to note the fact that the rider had the appearance of being a ranchman or cowboy.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and a broad sombrero was tipped back upon his head.

But they saw more than this, for as he moved a little closer a gun was disclosed in his hand, and pointed directly toward them.

"Hold up your hands, and walk over to ther right!" came the command.

"Well, stranger, we are not in the habit of holding up our hands, even when we are told to do so. What do you mean, anyhow?" the young deadshot retorted, quickly, as he took a step toward the horseman.

"It may be that I've made a mistake," came the reply, in a hesitating sort of way. "Your voice don't sound like anyone I know. But hold up your hands, jest ther same, 'cause we ain't runnin' no chances."

Instead of obeying, the boy suddenly reached forth with his left hand and caught the horseman by the wrist.

At the same moment he drew a gun with his right, and pressed the muzzle hard against his breast.

"Now then, my friend," he said, coolly, "I reckon you had better explain yourself right away. If you don't, you will have a hole through you before you know it."

"Wow!" exclaimed the horseman, excitedly. "Look out, boys! He's got me dead ter rights."

The other horsemen had halted among the rocks at the edge of the glen, and it was so dark that they dared not fire lest they might hit their leader.

"Don't get excited, any of you," our hero said, quickly. "I

hardly think you fellows are robbers, though by the way this man acts it seems that we are. As I just said a little while ago, we are not in the habit of holding up our hands, even when we are told to do so. Now then, explain yourself in a hurry."

The last was said to the horseman he had seized, and the muzzle of the revolver was pushed against his stomach to emphasize the words.

"It must be a mistake," the man said, with a gasp of alarm. "We're after cattle thieves. There was three of 'em, an' we know 'em when we see 'em, too. I reckon you ain't one of them, young feller, 'cause I kin see you ain't nothin' more than a boy."

"You have got it just right when you say I am not one of the cattle thieves. I will tell you who I am, and then probably you will be satisfied. I am Young Wild West, and the man behind me is Cheyenne Charlie, one of my partners. The rest of my friends are back in the glen, where you see the light."

"You mean ter say you're Young Wild West?" cried the man, excitedly.

"That's right, stranger."

"Well, then, I reckon we have made a big mistake. I owe you an apology, my boy. Jest take that gun away. I'm Scotty Jamieson, an' I own a ranch somethin' like fifteen miles to ther south of here. This is what I call a big mistake, an' I'm mighty sorry for it."

Our hero had met so many bad characters that he was by this time well able to judge a man by the way he spoke.

He was satisfied that the leader of the horsemen was telling the truth, so he quickly drew back his revolver and released his grip upon the wrist he had been holding.

"Come on where it is light, and we'll talk to you," he said.

"Thank you for ther invitation. I'll do that right away. Boys, it's all right. It's Young Wild West, ther Champion Deadshot. You have all heard of him, an' I reckon maybe some of yer has seen him."

"I have," came a voice from behind, and then one of the horsemen crowded his way to the front. "I seen him down in Texas less than a year ago."

"Hooray!" cried the leader. "This is what I call mighty lucky. Come on, boys, we'll go where it's light, an' then I reckon we might be able ter git Young Wild West ter help us ketch ther horse thieves. He's generally in that line of business whenever he gits ther chance, so I've heard."

Wild and Charlie now led the way back to the camp.

Jim and the girls were kneeling behind the rocks, their rifles in their hands, which told plainly that they were ready to fight.

The moment he saw them Scotty Jamieson, the ranchman, took off his hat, and waving it over his head, shouted:

"Three cheers for Young Wild West an' his friends, boys! Let yourselves loose."

The cheer that went up awoke the echoes.

CHAPTER II.

OUR FRIENDS ARE IN LUCK

"I reckon these fellers is all right, Wild," Cheyenne Charlie whispered to the young deadshot, as the cheer went up.

"I haven't the least doubt of it, Charlie," was the reply.

"I am a little interested in what the leader said, too. They are looking for cattle thieves. Perhaps we will have a chance to help run them down."

"You kin bet your life we will, an' we'll do it, too, an' don't yer forgit it."

As Scotty Jamieson put on his hat after he was done shouting at the top of his voice, Wild nodded to him and said:

"Now then, Mr. Jamieson, I reckon it will be in order to introduce you to the girls."

"Please ter meet 'em, I'm sure," was the reply, and the ranchman bowed awkwardly.

The boy went on with the introduction, calling each by their name.

Then the ranchman named over the cowboys, who numbered seven.

"These is all my men," he said, as he looked at them rather proudly. "They're all mighty good ones at ther business, too, an' whenever there's any fightin' ter be done they kin be depended on ter do it. Some time this mornin' a raid was made on a bunch of stray cattle what belongs ter me, an' ther thieves got away with about a dozen of 'em. It ain't ther first time it's happened, an' I ain't ther only one as has suf-

fered sich a loss in ther last few months. There's a gang of rascals workin' around here, an' we happen ter know two or three of 'em. As soon as we found out that ther cattle had been took we struck out ter find ther thieves. Late this afternoon, while we was followin' a fresh trail, we sighted three of ther rascals. One of 'em was Mike Jager, a galoot what's never been knowed ter do any work, an' who has a hard reputation. He come from one of ther minin' camps, an' has been hangin' around these parts, stayin' in one place or another, for about six months. I s'pose he's ther leader of ther gang. Ther two he had with him was a darky called Black Pete, an' a feller named Locke. All of us knows 'em by sight, an' it was easy for us ter see who they was, though we wasn't very close ter 'em. We follered ther trail till we struck a ravine here, an' when we seen ther light we thought sartin we had run 'em down. That's why I acted ther way I did when we met you."

"Well, I could tell that you had made a mistake the moment I heard you talk, Mr. Jamieson," the young deadshot replied. "But still I had to show you that we were not in the habit of holding up our hands in order to do so. Of course I won't say I never did such a thing, but under such circumstances it wasn't necessary. I reckon you found that much out."

"I sartinly did, Young Wild West," and the ranchman looked at him and nodded his head admiringly. "You got ther drop on me in a jiffy. My! but what a grip you have got. I thought you was goin' ter break my wrist, but when I felt ther muzzle of your gun pokin' ag'in my stomach I thought it was all up with me. I knowed you wasn't one of ther three we was lookin' for, but I thought you was jest as bad, if not worse."

"You know putty well that there ain't nothin' bad about us, I reckon," Cheyenne Charlie spoke up, with a grin. "You said somethin' about gittin' us ter help yer run down ther cattle thieves. We'll only be too glad ter help yer, I'm sartin, but Wild is ther one ter talk to about that. He's ther boss of our party, an' what he says is law."

"Well, if you folks is ther means of ketchin' ther cattle thieves for us, I reckon I'll make it all right with yer. It sartinly is worth somethin' ter me to clean out this gang, an' I know there's other ranchmen within fifty miles of here who would be mighty glad ter chip in a few dollars in ther way of a reward."

"Don't trouble yourself about any reward, Mr. Jamieson," our hero declared. "We are not looking for anything of that kind. You see, the way it is with us is that we are only too glad to be of service to such people as you are. We are never better satisfied than when we are on the trail of wrongdoers, and that is why we have made so many enemies."

"An' so many friends, too, I s'pose," the ranchman chuckled.

"Well, it's very nice to make friends, of course."

"You kin count me as one of 'em, an' a true one, too, even though yer don't ketch ther cattle thieves for us."

"Thank you for saying that, Mr. Jamieson. Now then, I suppose your horses are pretty well tired out, so you may as well make up your minds to stop right here with us until morning. It is useless to try and search for the cattle thieves in the darkness."

"Well," and the ranchman shook his head and looked at the cowboys with him, "our horses is putty well tired out, an' no mistake. But it's only fifteen miles to ther ranch, an' I s'pose we had better go on. My wife an' daughter Nell will be worryin' about me if we stay out all night. But why can't you go with us?"

"Well, that wouldn't be hardly the thing to do now, since we have settled down so comfortably. I reckon we will stay here, and if you feel disposed to go on home we will ride over the first thing in the morning and meet you. Then we will see what can be done toward finding the cattle thieves. The chances are that they are not a great distance from your ranch."

"No, it ain't likely they've gone very far." I think I know about where they git rid of ther cattle they steal, anyhow. I've got my suspicions of a feller named Robinson. He sells more cattle than any other ranchman in these parts, an' yet he don't raise as many as ther rest of us do. That sorter looks suspicious, don't it?"

"Well, I should say it did. But you ought to be able to pick out your cattle by the brand you have on them."

"Well, that would be easy enough ter do, but how are you goin' ter pick 'em out when you can't find 'em? Me an' two or three others has been over to Robinson's ranch three or four times lookin' for cattle that's missin', but we ain't never been able ter find any of 'em there. It sorter seems as though he must have a place ter hide ther stolen ones he gits, if he really is a man of that kind."

Wild and his friends were not a little interested, especially when they heard about the man called Robinson, who might have a way of selling stolen cattle.

What they liked was adventure, with a smack of mystery connected with it, and if the ranchman was correct in what he said, they were in a fair way to be gratified in this respect.

"Well," said the young deadshot, after a pause, "if you are bent on going back to the ranch, why do so. We will set out at daylight, and it won't take us long to ride the fifteen miles, though we can't go so very fast with a couple of loaded pack-horses. But we will be there not long after sunrise, you can bet."

"Good! We'll be waitin' for yer. I've only got four more men workin' for me jest now, an' they're out on ther range somewhere. My wife an' daughter Nell is home alone, an' though both of 'em knows how to handle shootin' irons, they won't feel jest comfortable if they have ter put in ther night without me bein' there."

The cowboys' horses had rested somewhat by this time, so after a little further conversation, and being reassured that our friends would ride to the ranch without fail the first thing in the morning, Jamieson gave the word to leave.

The cowboys broke into another cheer as they rode out of the glen, and then the clatter of hoofs sounded through the ravine.

As the sounds gradually died out our hero turned to his companions and said:

"Well, I reckon we have fallen into something that will prove a little interesting before we get through. I'm mighty glad of it, too."

"So am I, Wild," the scout declared, nodding his head approvingly. "Cattle thieves is our meat this time, an' you kin bet we're goin' ter git 'em."

"I am very glad there is a ranch so close by," Anna spoke up. "I always like to meet those of our own sex, and Mr. Jamieson says he has a wife and daughter. I am sure we will be able to put in a pleasant time of it while you are hunting the cattle thieves."

"Quite likely, gal. You kin let your jaw run for fair when you git hold of someone ter talk to what likes ter hear it. Wimmen-folks generally chatters like a lot of magpies when they git together. You'll have a good time, all right, I'll bet."

"Well, I may be pretty good at talking, Charlie," his wife retorted, good-naturedly, "but I must say that I have never yet been compelled to give you a real lecture. You have done pretty well since we were married, and I am rather proud of you for it."

"Good! That's ther way ter talk! Do you think you'll be able ter say that when you have been married two or three years, Wild?"

"That is more than I can say," the young deadshot retorted, making out that he was very grave. "No one knows just what will happen. But I am not married yet, Charlie, and I am quite sure I won't be until I get old enough."

They talked along in a joking strain for probably fifteen minutes after the ranchmen and his cowboys took their departure.

"Then, much to their surprise, the clatter of hoofs sounded for the second time since darkness had set in.

"They're coming back, I think, Wild," Jim Dart observed, as he started to his feet and made his way out of the glen.

The young deadshot and the scout followed him, both thinking that Jim was correct in what he said.

They had just about time to get to the edge of the rocks that were grouped about in irregular fashion when three horsemen appeared through the darkness.

They came to a halt a short distance away, and dismounting, threw the bridle-reins over their horses' heads and then began stealing straight toward the spot where Wild and his partners were concealed.

The young deadshot nudged his companions to remain silent, and then all three waited to see what would happen.

The three men paused within a few feet of them, and peered over the rocks toward the camp.

Though they could see the light that came from the lantern, they were not able to discern the tents or anyone sitting there.

The rocks and bushes were in the way.

"It must be that Scotty Jamieson has gone into camp here, boys," one of the men said, in a very low tone of voice, but quite loud enough for our friends to hear. "I reckon he got tired lookin' for us. But they was hot on our trail, all right."

Wild and his partners knew now for a certainty that the three men were the cattle thieves the ranchman and his cowboys had been pursuing.

But they remained perfectly silent and listened.

"Of course it's them," one of the men with him answered. "Who else could it be? There ain't many folks travelin' this way after dark."

"Dat's right, boss," the third man in the party observed. "What are you goin' to do now?"

"Find out for sure whether it's them or not, of course."

"Dat's it. One of us kin creep up an' have a look from behind de rocks."

"You'll be ther one ter do that, Pête," the other man declared. "You're so black they won't be able ter see you if your face happens ter show."

"All right. I ain't afraid," and so saying the negro, for our friends were now certain it was one, started to creep directly toward the rocks they were crouching behind.

Wild was ready for business now.

Though he had not expected to be able to catch the cattle thieves so soon, he thought it advisable to capture the three without delay, and then look after the rest, who must have taken the stolen cattle somewhere.

He touched his companions softly with his left hand, and then with a nod of his head he sprang to his feet and leaped before the astonished trio.

"Hands up!" he exclaimed, in a ringing tone of voice. "We have got you dead to rights."

"Hold on dar!" the darky cried, in alarm, for he was within a yard of the boy, and one of the revolvers Wild held in his hand almost touched his ebony face.

"Up with your hands!"

The man obeyed instantly, and as Charlie and Jim ran up to the other two they followed suit.

"So you wanted to see if Ranchman Jamieson and his men were camped here, did you?" our hero said, with a laugh.

"Well, they are not. But we are here, just the same. We know all about you, and we have got you. I reckon there is a jail waiting for you fellows somewhere, and it won't be long before you are in it."

"I don't know what you're talking about, young feller!" the leader exclaimed, affecting surprise, for he had quickly recovered from the surprise that had been given him.

"Don't go to telling any lies about it," Wild retorted, quickly. "I just told you that we knew all about you. You are Mike Jager, and you are wanted for steling cattle. Keep your hands right above your head, and don't dare to lower them, for if you do I will shoot you dead in your tracks. Now then, Jim, just take their hardware from them."

"Right you are, Wild," Dart exclaimed, and he thrust his revolver back into his belt and quickly relieved the three villains of their weapons.

They were armed quite heavily, for each of them had a brace of heavy revolvers and a keen-edged hunting knife, while their supply of cartridges was quite enough to stand a long siege.

Without being told what to do, Jim produced a hank of twine from one of his pockets, and with deft fingers he quickly tied the wrists of the three villains squarely together.

"There!" he exclaimed, when he had finished. "I reckon if you break those cords you ought to get away."

As their hands were behind them there was no chance to get them to their mouths so they might use their teeth, and utterly helpless, the three now began pleading with their captors.

But Wild quickly cut them short in this by saying:

"Shut up! I don't like to hear such villains as you begging for mercy. Ranchman Jamieson was here not long ago, and he told us all about you. That is quite enough to make us hold you and see to it that you are placed in the hands of the proper authorities. You have been carrying on your trade of cattle stealing for some time, so I understand, but you can bet all you're worth that you will never steal another steer. Come on, now, so we can have a good look at you. We will hold you here until morning, and then we'll ride over to Jamieson's ranch with you."

They each took charge of a prisoner and marched them back into the glen.

The girls and the Chinamen were waiting for them, for they had heard the voices and knew that Wild and his partners had effected a capture.

"Ah!" exclaimed Arietta, when she saw the faces of the trio, "the very villains the ranchman was pursuing, eh, Wild?"

"That's right, Et," was the reply. "They came along this way, and seeing our light they thought Jamieson and his cowboys had camped here for the night. But they made a mistake, I reckon, and it's all the better for us. I am a little sorry that we are making such rapid headway in cleaning

up the cattle thieves. But we will have enough to do, for we will make a call at Robinson's ranch to-morrow and try and find out what he does with the stolen cattle after they are taken to him."

The leader of the cattle thieves winced when he heard this. "Who told you that Robinson took ther cattle what was stole?" he asked, as though he was unable to refrain from putting the question.

"Never mind who told us. We know all about it, Mr. Mike Jager. You have been having everything your own way for the past few months, but you have run against a snag this time that will be the undoing of you."

"Well, there ain't no use in me sayin' nothing, so if you kin prove that we're cattle thieves, why go ahead an' do it."

"We will do that soon enough. You just sit down with your back to this tree now. Hop, just help him."

"Allee light, Misler Wild," and the Chinaman, who was ready to do anything he was told, caught hold of the man by the shoulders and forced him to the ground, so his back rested against the tree the boy had spoken of.

"Put the other fellows there, too, Hop. Then we will tie them there so they can't get away from the tree."

The Chinaman was not long in doing this, and then Cheyenne Charlie came forward with a lariat, which he wound rather tightly about them, and knotted it securely.

It was anything but a comfortable position the three prisoners were placed in.

But our friends felt that they could not afford to loosen their hands.

If the ropes cut into their wrists they must suffer the pain that came from it, that was all.

The tree was probably twenty feet from the two tents, but it was the only available place to tie them, and as the usual watch was to be kept during the night there was little danger of them escaping.

CHAPTER III.

THE THREE PRISONERS ESCAPE

Jim Dart, as usual, was the first to go on watch for the night, and when the rest had all sought the tents he took up a position from which he could watch the three men who were tied to the tree.

He could hear them conversing in low tones, and at the expiration of about fifteen minutes he arose and walked over to them, so as to make sure that they were all right.

"Young feller," said the leader, as he turned his gaze upon the boy, "it'll be worth a couple of hundred dollars to yer if you fix it so we kin git loose. Young Wild West needn't know that yer done it."

"You make a mistake if you think you can bribe me," Jim retorted, quickly. "Don't waste your words, but take your medicine and swallow it quietly."

"All right. Ther time will come when you'll be sorry for not doin' as we want yer. Don't think that we're goin' ter be sent to prison or hanged, 'cause we ain't. We'll git out of this scrape all right, an' then if we don't make it hot for you folks my name ain't Mike Jager."

"Go ahead and make all the threats you like, but be careful that you don't talk too loud, so you will awaken those who are asleep."

Jager said no more after this, and when Jim had walked completely around them he went and sat down again.

An hour slipped by.

At regular intervals Jim had taken a look at the prisoners and once again he sat down upon the rock and rested his rifle across his knees.

But he had not been sitting there but a few seconds when he heard a sound that greatly resembled a footfall to the right.

He listened to hear it repeated, but it was not, and then he decided that he must have been mistaken.

But the more he thought about it the more he became convinced that he should make a search, so he arose and, passing close to the prisoners, he walked stealthily among the rocks and bushes in the direction he had heard the sound.

The boy was scarcely twenty feet from the tree when the three men suddenly arose to their feet and started off toward the ravine.

Not a particle of noise did they make, and soon they had entirely disappeared.

Jim remained away perhaps five minutes, and when he came back, satisfied that it must have been a stone that had become

loosened and rolled down the bank somewhere, he went straight to the tree.

It was so dark that he did not notice that the prisoners were no longer there until he was within a few feet of it.

Then it was that he gave a violent start.

The sound he had heard meant something, after all.

He ran to the tree and picked up some pieces of the lariat that had held the prisoners secured.

That they could not escape without aid from the outside, the boy well knew, and quickly recovering from his surprise he ran to the tent and, seizing Wild by the ankles, called out, softly:

"Wake up! The villains have escaped!"

This was quite enough to arouse both Young Wild West and the scout.

The former was upon his feet in a jiffy.

"What's that you say, Jim?" he asked, hurriedly.

"They tricked me, Wild," was the reply. "It's too bad, and I can't make any excuses."

"How in thunder could they have got away without someone cuttin' 'em loose?" the scout asked, as he dashed out.

Wild seized the lantern, which had been turned down low, and making it brighter, he hurried to the tree.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, when he saw the severed pieces of rope. "Someone sneaked up in the darkness and cut them loose, Jim. But how could they get away right before your eyes? You were right here all the time, I suppose?"

"No, I wasn't right here all the time, Wild. I heard a sound off to the right that seemed to me to be a footstep. I listened to hear it repeated, but it was not. But I got it in my head that there was someone sneaking about, so after I saw that the prisoners were all right I went over there and looked around. When I came back the prisoners were gone."

"I understand it all!" the young deadshot exclaimed. "The sound you heard was made purposely to draw your attention that way, while someone did the work. Quite a clever piece of business. Well, it's all right. I don't blame you any. They have got away, and that's all there is to it. They won't go very far, though, for they are just the sort of men to look for revenge. I have met so many of their kind that I can tell that easily enough."

The horses belonging to the escaped rascals were still there, which showed that they did not think it advisable to run the risk of taking them with them.

But no doubt those who had come to the rescue had supplied horses for them to get away with.

Wild and his partners made a search of the vicinity with the lantern, but of course they found no signs of the rascals.

"Well, they left their horses here as well as their guns and knives," the young deadshot said, as he came back and set the lantern watch until morning, for they may come back and try to down us."

Jim then told how the leader had made his threats, after declaring that he and his companions would not be sent to prison or hanged.

"Just about like him," our hero said, shaking his head. "Well, we'll see about that. I think we were getting along a little too fast, anyhow. If we had held the leader and the other two, who are no doubt about the worst in the gang, there wouldn't have been so much for us to do. Now then, we have got to get the whole lot of them, and see to Robinson, the ranchman, as well."

The girls had heard them moving about, and they soon came out of the tent and wanted to know what had happened.

When they learned that the prisoners had escaped they were greatly surprised, but Wild took it so lightly that they soon got over it, and went back to their tent.

A strict watch was kept for the balance of the night, but nothing occurred to disturb them, and shortly before daylight Wild routed the two Chinamen out and set them at work.

Hop proceeded to load the pack-horses, while Wing prepared a hasty breakfast.

It was just getting daylight when they started to eat the morning meal, and by the time they had finished objects could be discerned at quite a distance.

Hop assisted his brother to pack away the rest of the things, and then all hands mounted and rode out of the glen into the ravine.

Here and there the ground was pretty soft, and the fresh print of horses' hoofs could be seen.

"They went this way, boys," our hero said to his partners, as he dismounted once and made a close examination of the ground. "Well, that's all right. We are going this way, too. We will ride straight to the ranch, and then we'll get Jamieson

and some of his cowboys to go over to Robinson's ranch with us. I think that is the best place to go, since I am anxious to find out if there is anything in what Jamieson thinks about the ranchman over there hiding the stolen cattle.

"That's it, Wild," the scout declared. "Robinson's is the place to go first. If he is in with a gang of cattle thieves, most likely they hang out putty close to him, an' we'll find 'em all there."

The ravine extended along for four or five miles, running in a rather crooked fashion.

When they finally reached the end of it they ascended a gentle rise for half a mile, and then found themselves upon a comparatively low stretch of country, where there was pretty good grazing for cattle.

There was a plain trail that led toward quite a bunch of timber, and they followed this, going along as fast as it was advisable to, considering that the pack-horses had heavy loads to carry.

Passing through the woods, they came in sight of a ranch.

That it was Jamieson's they were well satisfied, for he had said that there was no other in sight, if they continued in that direction, before they came to it.

The sun was now showing in the east, and beyond a few white fleecy clouds, the sky was clear blue.

Our friends knew it would be very warm, but this mattered little to them, since they had become accustomed to the Arizona climate.

As they drew nearer the ranch a horseman came riding out to meet them.

They recognized him at once as Jamieson.

As they came together the ranchman called out cheerily:

"Good mornin', everybody! I've been waitin' for yer for the last half hour. I had my breakfast mighty early this mornin'."

"Well, we got up a little before daylight, and we have been on the move ever since," Wild answered. "I suppose your wife and daughter were pleased when you got back last night."

"Yes, mighty pleased, an' they was both delighted, too, when I told 'em about ther gals comin' ter see 'em this mornin'. There they are now!" and he turned and pointed to the porch of the house.

Sure enough, the forms of two females could be seen waving handkerchiefs to the approaching party.

They all rode to the house, and while in the saddle our hero related to the ranchman how they had caught the three men he had been searching for, and also how they had escaped so cleverly.

Jamieson was astounded when he heard this.

"How could they have got away?" he asked, shaking his head.

"Well, one of their gang must have discovered where they were, or possibly there were more than one," the young deadshot said coolly. "But it's all right. We can't expect to have everything our own way all the time, you know. We will get them again, see if we don't."

"Well, it's too bad they got away, for Mike Jager is sartinly a scoundrel. Ther nigger an' ther other feller is about as bad. I don't know anything about ther rest of ther gang, or whether there was any more of 'em or not. But there must have been, 'cause when we got on ther trail of ther three we didn't see nothin' of ther cattle what was stole from me. I s'pose ther rest of 'em took ther cattle away."

"That is just what they did. When they found they were being pursued the three let you see them, so you would follow them, while the rest could have the chance to get off with the cattle. That's an old trick, Mr. Jamieson."

"Yes, I s'pose it is. Well, I don't know how we're goin' ter make out, but I'm goin' ter leave it all to you. But here we are. Now then, ther gals will find that they're welcome here, an' no mistake."

The ranchman's wife was a comely-looking woman of forty, and the daughter a very pretty girl of seventeen.

They both ran from the porch, and as the girls dismounted they gave them a genuine ranch greeting.

Jamieson managed to tell his wife and daughter who the visitors were, though he was unable to call them all by name.

Wild helped him out in this, so the introduction was soon completed.

"Have yer had your breakfast?" the ranchman asked.

"Oh, yea. We started to eat before it was fairly daylight."

"Well, yer couldn't have had very much. Ter missus has got some waitin' for yer."

"Well, I am much obliged to you for the invitation, but I, for one, have had quite enough to last me until noon," the young deadshot declared.

"The same with all of us," Arietta spoke up. "We had our coffee, and enough to eat to satisfy us, I am sure."

"Another thing," Jim Dart observed, with a shake of his head, "we haven't time to eat any more, because we want to get after the cattle thieves as quickly as possible."

"That's right, Jim," and our hero gave a nod of approval. "Now then, Mr. Jamieson," and he turned to the ranchman again, "whenever you are ready we will strike out for Robinson's ranch."

"You're goin' over there, eh?"

"Yes, for from what you told us last night I have an idea that it is the proper place to go. If he has been receiving stolen cattle from the rascals, his place is where we should look. Of course you would like to get the cattle back, but you want the thieves captured, too."

"Yes, I'd like ter have ther thieves caught, even if I don't git ther cattle back."

"Well, I think you will have both your desires granted. Something seems to tell me that we are going to get a whole lot of information by riding over to Robinson's."

"Me likee go to Robinson's, too, so be," Hop Wah spoke up, as he rode up on his piebald cayuse, and looked at Wild almost pleadingly.

"Oh, he thinks he'll have a chance ter play a trick on somebody, I s'pose," the scout observed, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You had better not let him go."

"Lat allee light, Misler Charlie," the Chinaman protested. "Me velly smartee Chinee, and me wantee helpee. Maybe me findee outtee somethin'."

"Well, if Wild says you kin go, I'm satisfied."

"It is pretty certain he won't be a hindrance to us, Charlie, so we will let him go, the young deadshot declared.

"Hip hi! Hoolay!" shouted Hop, waving his hat. "Me havee velly bigee time, so be. Me findee um cattle thieves. Me shootee velly muchee staight, too."

"With a firecracker," added the scout, with a grin.

"Lat allee light, Misler Charlie. Um fireclacker shootee velly muchee staight sometimes."

"Yes, when yer set one off under a table with a lot of galoots settin' around it playin' cards, it generally shoots putty straight. It goes right up an' makes ther table upset, an' then there's ther dickens ter pay. You kin shoot all right with a firecracker, Hop, but when it comes to a gun, you couldn't hit ther broad side of a barn."

"So ther heathen uses firecrackers ter shoot with, does he?" the ranchman asked, not a little interested in what he had heard.

"Sometimes he uses crackers with pretty good effect, Mr. Jamieson," Wild answered. "It seems that Hop worked in a factory where fireworks were made before he left China, and he can manufacture them quite handily. Being a joker, he uses them generally to make fun. But, as I just said, sometimes the results help us out a whole lot. Probably you will learn more about our clever Chinee before we leave here. Now then, if you are ready, we will strike out right away."

"Some of ther boys is waitin' ter go along with us. They all wanted ter go, but I want two ter stay around here, 'cause there ain't no tellin' but what Mike Jager might sneak around this way an' make trouble. He's jest ther sort of galoot ter do that, yer know. He'll sartinly want ter git revenge on you for ketchin' him last night. He won't call it square 'cause he got away. That ain't ther way with Mike."

"Oh, no, he has already threatened to get square with us all. Well, Mr. Jamieson, you can go and get the men you want to take with you, and we won't lose any more time."

The ranchman quickly mounted his horse and rode toward the big building that stood near the corral.

Before he reached it he shouted something, and then four cowboys suddenly appeared, riding hard and waving their hats.

Our hero and his partners instantly recognized them as four of the companions of the ranchman when they had met them the night before in the ravine.

"Hooray for Young Wild West!" one of them cried, as he galloped up and brought his broncho to a sudden halt.

The rest took up the cheer, though Wild raised his hand and shook his head for them to stop it.

"Boys, what do you think?" the ranchman said, when they had become quiet. "Young Wild West an' his pards caught Mike Jager an' ther nigger an' Locke last night. They had 'em hard an' fast tied to a tree, but in ther night someone come along an' cut 'em loose."

This astounded the cowboys, for they could not understand how such a thing could have happened, especially when Young Wild West and his partners were connected with the case.

But when they heard all about it they agreed that it was a rather clever trick.

"It's too bad," one of them declared, shaking his head. "If we had held them three ther rest wouldn't have been so hard ter git, 'cause without a leader they wouldn't have knowed what ter do. Jager is ther boss of ther crowd."

"Well, I don't quite agree with you on that," Wild said, with a smile. "From what I have heard, I consider that the man called Robinson does all the planning. You will find that he is the brains of the crowd of cattle-thieves, if I am not mistaken. Anyhow, we are going over there to interview him."

"Goin' ter Robinson's?" one of the others cried, in surprise.

"Yes, that's just where we are going. Now, then, if you are ready we will start right off."

They were all ready, and waving their hats to the girls, who were still standing on the porch with the ranchman's wife and daughter, they galloped away over the level stretch to the east.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CATTLE THIEVES.

It will be in order for us to explain just how the three cattle thieves escaped from the camp of Young Wild West in such a clever manner.

Our hero was right when he said the three had showed themselves in order to get the ranchman and the cowboys to follow them while their companions got away with the cattle.

There were seven others engaged in the work of stealing cattle, and Mike Jager was the acknowledge leader of the band.

Three of the latter were Indians of the bad type, and the others were simply ruffians who cared nothing whatever for the law.

They had plied their trade for quite a long time, and had profited largely from it, since it was quite easy for them to dispose of the stolen cattle.

After they delivered the cattle to the place they wanted to take them the seven men had nothing to do but to wait for the return of their leader and the two who went with him.

They thought they would surely be back by the time it was dark, but when they failed to show up a fellow called Redney suggested that they go and look for them.

"Maybe Scotty Jamieson an' his men got 'em, boys," he said, shaking his head. "We had better go an' see about it."

They all agreed with him right away, and the result was that four of them saddled their horses and got ready to go in search of the missing trio.

They rode swiftly away in the direction their leader and the other two had taken, and kept on until they reached the ravine.

They seemed to think that if they had been chased there they would go on through to the other end and then turn and make their way around to the headquarters.

It was by mere chance that as they rode along through the ravine, their horses at a walk, that they caught sight of the faint glimmer of light that came from the glen where our friends were camped.

If they had been riding at a gallop, Jim Dart surely would have heard them.

The moment they saw a light there Redney, who was in charge of the men, called a halt and advised all hands to be very quiet.

He did not think he would find Jager and the others there, but he wanted to know who was there.

"Maybe it's Jamieson an' his gang," he whispered, "but we'll soon find out. Billy, you go with me. Ther others will stay here with ther horses."

"All right, pard," was the reply, and then the two crept around among the rocks and slowly approached the camp.

The dim light the lantern shed was not much, but as they crept nearer there was enough light for them to see the three men bound to the tree.

They also saw the boy, who was at that moment sitting near by on the watch.

Even then the two cattle thieves had no idea that their missing companions were there.

But Redney was curious to know something more, so he crept softly forward, feeling that if the person on guard should hear them they would have a good chance to get away in the darkness.

He crept up close to the tree, followed by his partner, and then it was that one of the prisoners was recognized.

Not a little surprised, the two prowlers held back and remained silent for the space of a few seconds.

Then Redney, who was something of a genius, peered around from behind a rock at the boy who was doing guard duty.

He knew very well that it would be no use in cutting the prisoners loose while he was there, for some one would surely get shot before they could get away.

"Billy," said he, in a very low whisper, "jest find a stone an' chuck it over that way so ther boy will hear it when it strikes. He'll be putty sure ter go over there ter find out what it means, an' then we'll cut our pards loose in a hurry. I don't know who these people are, nor I don't care, but they've got our pards hard an' fast, an' we must git 'em away from 'em."

Billy gave a nod and crept around, feeling upon the ground until he found a stone suitable for the purpose.

Then he raised himself upon his knees and hurled it into a clump of bushes some distance away.

It happened that the stone struck a soft spot of earth when it fell, and it sounded very much like a footfall, since it caused a twig to crack.

At first the two villains thought the ruse was not going to work, but they waited and finally when they saw Jim Dart rise and move stealthily in the direction the sound had come from they were elated.

He had barely got out of sight in the darkness when the two villains brought their hunting-knives into play and cut the rope that bound the prisoners to the tree.

It was done very quickly, almost before the three realized it.

"Come on, boys. It's me—Redney," was all they heard from the villain who had cleverly planned the rescue, and then they slipped silently away through the darkness and got out of the glen.

"There ain't no time ter git your horses, or anything else, Mike," Redney declared. "We'll ride double, that's all. Come on. It won't pay us to stay around here. I don't know who them people are, nor I don't care."

Jager seemed well satisfied with this arrangement, so he got on Redney's horse and then went riding away.

When they were at a safe distance they put their horses to a gallop and finally brought them down to a walk.

It was not until then that Mike Jager explained how he and his two pards had been captured.

He was much elated, as might be supposed, and when he had told who his captors were and declared that he would be revenged upon them, the rest felt like cheering, for they had heard of Young Wild West and his partners, and the trouble they kept causing men of their stamp.

"I'm mighty glad you took a notion ter come an' look for us, Redney," Jager exclaimed, as they rode on. "Young Wild West is a dangerous customer, an' if we don't look out he'll break up our business. We're goin' ter tell Robinson about it jest as soon as we kin. Did yer see him afore yer left?"

"No," was the reply. "We drove ther cattle into ther cave, an' we stayed there, too, until I got it in my head that somethin' might have happened ter yer. But we'll see him when we git back. If he's gone ter bed we'll wake him, that's all, 'cause enough was said ter me ter make me believe that Young Wild West is after him. Wait till Robinson hears that. There'll be some fun then, 'cause yer know what an ugly galoot he is when he gits mad."

The villains rode on back through the ravine and finally struck across the country.

In due time they reached their rendezvous, which we might as well state right here was a big cave that nature had hollowed under a cliff.

It was located within half a mile of the ranch house that was owned by the man named Robinson.

The entrance to the big cave had been discovered accidentally by Robinson shortly after he bought the ranch from another party.

He had ordered some men to dig into the face of the cliff so a shed might be erected there.

The corral he had built ran out from the cliff, and thus saved a long stretch of fencing.

While digging away the dirt there was a cave-in, and the cave was discovered.

It occurred to Robinson right away that he might put the underground place to some good use, and being a villain at heart he did so later on, after he had become acquainted with Mike Jager and some of his pals.

They stole cattle from the outlying ranges and brought them there.

They were driven into the cave, which was large enough to

hold as many as a hundred with a certain degree of comfort. Then when a good chance afforded during the night, the cattle were driven away with some of Robinson's and disposed of to a party who was quite willing to take them, no matter what brands they bore.

A part of the cave had been partitioned off for the quarters of the cattle thieves, and as plenty of air was admitted from the face of the cliff higher up they really had quite a comfortable rendezvous.

Some of the cattle thieves were employed as cowboys by Robinson, so they were not compelled to keep in hiding much.

But Mike Jager, the negro called Black Pete, and Locke were forced to keep in hiding, since they were under suspicion.

As they rode up to the ranch they dismounted before the house.

It was rather late by this time, and no light was burning there.

But Rodney gave a knock at the door and it was not long before Robinson came and opened it.

"What's ther trouble?" the ranchman demanded, rather sharply, for he had been awakened from a sound sleep.

"There's a whole lot of trouble, boss," was the reply. "Here's Mike. I reckon he kin tell yer somethin' that will make you open your eyes."

At first Robinson seemed inclined not to bother with them, but when they talked so earnestly he at last admitted Jager and Rodney, while the others went to their quarters.

"What's all this about, anyhow?" he asked, looking at the leader of the cattle thieves, sharply.

"A little liquor first, Robinson, an' then I'll tell yer somethin'."

"Well, I suppose I will have to do as you say, but I don't like the idea of being aroused in the middle of the night."

The liquor was soon forthcoming, and when Jager had taken a stiff horn he turned to the ranchman, who stood with folded arms before him, and said:

"Young Wild West is after you, Robinson."

"What!" and the ranchman gave a violent start.

"You've heard of Young Wild West, ain't yer?" the villain went on, smiling faintly.

"Yes, I've heard quite a lot about that fellow. What do you mean when you say he's after me?"

"Jest what I say."

Then the ranchman got a chair and drew it up close to him while Mike Jager related all that had happened and what he had learned.

Two or three times the ranchman gave vent to muttered oaths, but he never once interrupted Jager during the recital of the story.

"Well, if you're through, I think I'll take a drink," he said, quite calmly, and he reached for the bottle and filled a glass.

"What gets me," he went on, when he had swallowed the drink, "is how anybody could suspect me. I know you fellows have been trailed here several times, but when they couldn't find any cattle here I don't see how they could think there was anything wrong about me. I've been posing as an honest man ever since I've lived here, and I think I have made out very well in that respect."

"Well, Young Wild West thinks you have got something ter do with ther cattle stealin', an' that's all there is ter it. Most likely you'll hear from him afore very long."

"Well, if you attend to your business properly I will never hear from him, Mike. You certainly ought to fear him more than I. Can't you see to it that he never lives to make any more trouble?"

"That's what I'm goin' ter try to do, Robinson. I've sartinly got it in for that boy an' his pards, an' I won't be satisfied until I have downed him."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk. But even if you fail in doing it, what do I care? Young Wild West and his partners can come here, or a whole regiment of soldiers can come here, for that matter, but they will never be able to find that we have a secret cave unless some one should tell them."

"Well, it ain't likely that any of ther boys would let on anything about that. They don't want ter git ropes around their necks. You know what would happen if one of us was ter tell. They don't care much about a jedge an' jury in these parts, an' it would be a case of hangin', anyhow."

"Well, I guess you have got that pretty nearly right," and the ranchman smiled, but rather faintly. "But let us be serious. Things have taken a turn that I will admit I don't like much. You three fellows have got to lie low for a few days, and that's all there is to it. We have something like twenty-eight steers in the cave now, and about half of them belong to Scotty Jamieson. But I think there is plenty of

fodder for them, so they can be kept nicely and be fattening while we're waiting. We won't try to get them away tomorrow night, as I intended, but will wait and see what happens. In the meantime, if Young Wild West attempts to pick a row with me I will shoot him down before he has the least chance. I don't care if they do call him the Champion Dead-shot of the West. I am something of a shot myself, and I propose to stick up for my rights."

CHAPTER V.

THE SCENT GROWS WARM

Hop Wah rode close to the four cowboys as they were going over to Robinson's ranch, and he amused them greatly by the remarkable stories he told about China.

Though there was no head nor tail to what he was saying, he had such a comical way about him that the cowboys voted him to be the funniest Chinaman they had ever seen.

Cheyenne Charlie heard what was going on, so after awhile he dropped back to the rear and joined the little party.

"You fellers don't want ter believe anything ther heathen tells yer," he declared, as he saw them laughing at something the clever Chinese had just related. "He couldn't tell ther truth if he was goin' ter be hanged ther next minute. But he's a putty good feller, though, 'cause he kin do some of ther funniest tricks yer ever seen. Hop kin handle a pack of cards better than ther galoot what invented 'em. He kin make an ace turn into a queen, or anything he wants ter, an' there ain't no one as kin jest tell how he does it."

"He'll have ter show us somethin' with ther cards after we git through with this business we're on," one of them answered, looking much interested. "We all know somethin' about cards, yer know."

"You would be funny cowboys if yer didn't," and the scout chuckled and nodded his head.

"You havee lilce smokee, Misler Charlie?" Hop asked, as he tendered the scout a cigar.

"Not much I won't!" was the quick retort, and turning to the cowboys, Charlie added, warningly:

"Don't none of you fellers take a cigar from ther heathen. If yer do you'll be likely ter have ther end of your nose blowed off. He's always got cigars what's loaded with powder, an' when they explode they're apt ter do damage."

This surprised them somewhat, and Hop looked as though he was offended because the scout had given him away.

"Me no wantee blowee uppee um cowboys, Misler Charlie," he declared. "Ley allec light. Me waitce till me gittee to Robinson's lanch. Len maybe me makec somethin' go bang."

"Well, wait till you git there, then. But you had better let Wild know what you're up ter afore you do anything like that."

The scout then told some of the amusing things Hop had done on various occasions, and in this way the time passed quickly enough for those who were listening.

But it was not such a long ride, anyhow, and in about an hour they rode through a thin strip of timber and saw the ranch lying right before them.

It was anything but a well-stocked ranch, and the buildings were in not very good order.

As our hero looked over and saw the high cliff extending along for a mile or two he turned to the ranchman and said:

"Robinson's cattle don't have a very broad range. I suppose the best feeding ground is out to the south."

"Yes, that's right, though some of 'em run up ther mountain, where there's putty good fodder. But I don't believe he's got more than two or three hundred cattle, anyhow."

"He has sold the most of them I suppose?"

"Well, I've heard down at ther station that he ships a good many. He generally manages ter load up ther cars in ther night-time. It's a good forty-eight hours' drive to ther station, but it seems funny that no one has ever seen Robinson load ther cars with his cattle in ther daylight. That's another thing what's made it look rather strange. But I'm sartin that ther cattle he ships ain't all his, not by a good deal."

"You have lost quite a lot, I believe?"

"Yes, I s'pose I've lost more than two hundred in ther last few months."

"Well, if it is found that Robinson has been disposing of them he will owe you quite a sum of money."

"Yes, but I don't s'pose I'll ever git anything. Me an'

Robinson don't pull very good. He knows I don't like him, an' I'm sartin he don't like me."

"You are on speaking terms, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, we speak whenever we can't git along without it. He will be a whole lot surprised when he sees me comin' over here with you folks."

"Maybe he will be a great deal surprised before we come back."

"Well, I hope yer find out somethin', anyhow."

"It will be rather strange if we don't find out something that's worth while. You just do the talking when we get there and I won't say a word unless it becomes necessary."

"All right. I know putty well what ter say. I'm lookin' for ther cattle I lost, an' I've got an idea that they're somewhere around Robinson's place. That's about ther size of it."

They all saw the corral which ran along the face of the cliff, and the shanty that was built at one end of it.

But no one had the least idea that by entering that shanty and sliding open a concealed door they could ride right into a big cave and find the stolen cattle.

As they neared the house they saw Robinson riding slowly toward the corral, where three or four cowboys could be seen loitering, their horses grazing near them.

There were not many cattle in the corral, and there was no necessity for them being there, since they were doing nothing at all.

Robinson looked over his shoulder when he saw the party approaching, but appeared to pay no particular attention to them.

He rode slowly on, and just as he reached the cowboys near the shanty our friends came riding up.

They were met by anything but pleasant looks from the ranchman and his men.

"Well, what do you want, Jamieson?" Robinson called out, after a pause.

"I'm over here on ther same errand what generally brings me here," was the reply. "I lost some cattle yisterday afternoon, an' ther trail leads this way."

"See here," and Robinson's eyes flashed, "I'm gittin' tired of this sort of business. Why is it that you always come here to look for cattle every time you lose them? When I lose any I don't go to your place and bother you. You don't think I'm a cattle thief, do you?"

"Well, I never said yer was," retorted Jamieson, showing considerable spirit. "But I'm sorter puzzled that you never see anything of ther steers I lose, when I know they sartinly must come within your eyesight every time they're drove off by ther thieves. Ther trail proves that."

"Well, suppose they were to drive a couple of hundred of your cattle off and come right close to my house during the night? Would I be supposed to see them?"

"This wasn't done in ther night-time. It happened yisterday afternoon."

"Well, I hate to have any one think that there's anything crooked about me, but as I have told you before, you are welcome to search my premises. If you find any cattle here that belongs to you, you are welcome to take them, and I will pay you a hundred dollars for each one I have. Now, then, you know pretty well what sort of a man I am. But it seems to me that you came here this morning looking for trouble. You have got three strangers with you. What do they want?"

"Oh, they jest come along with me. They're stoppin' at my ranch for a day or two."

"They are, eh?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, I don't like the looks of them, especially that boy with the long hair. He acts too independent like to suit me."

"I am sorry for that, my friend," Wild spoke up, as he dismounted and walked smilingly toward the rascally ranchman. "I didn't know I was doing any acting at all. But since you don't know anything about Jamieson's missing cattle, probably you could tell us where we could find a fellow by the name of Mike Jager."

"Mike Jager, eh? How should I know where to find him?"

"Well, probably you don't know, but you could answer the question fairly, I think."

"Well, I know a man named Jager by sight, and that's all I do know. You can ask my men if they have seen anything of him."

"Ain't seen him in over a week," one of them declared, shaking his head.

"Well, we saw him last night. He had a darky and a white man with him. The fact is, Mr. Robinson, Jager and the two I have just mentioned stole the cattle from Mr. Jamieson."

"Is that so? Well, I am not much surprised at that. I

always thought Mike was a rascal. But where is he now? You saw him last night, you say?"

"We don't know where he is or we wouldn't ask you."

"Well, what did you ask me for?"

"Because we thought probably you knew."

"Boy, I think you are going a little too far. You are altogether too insulting for me. You take my advice now and ride away from here as quick as you can. I am tired of being questioned about stolen cattle and cattle thieves."

"Don't get offended, Mr. Robinson. I am sure I have said nothing to warrant you acting like this."

"Never mind what you have said, Young Wild West. You light out."

"Ah, you know my name, eh?"

The ranchman bit his lip, for he had spoken before he thought.

"I guessed it," he observed, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, you guessed just right, then. But surely you won't object to us staying here awhile. You have already told Mr. Jamieson that he could make a search for his cattle on your premises."

"Yes, I said that, and I meant it, too. He can go ahead and search as much as he wants to."

"Well, since we are his guests you will permit us to join him in the search, won't you?"

"Well, all right. I'll take back what I said. Go ahead and look around all you want to. If you find any cattle here that don't belong to me, I'll make you a handsome present."

While this conversation was going on Hop had ridden on around to the back of the corral near the shanty.

The Chinaman had no particular reason in doing this, but as he was about to dismount he caught sight of a face peering out from the half-opened door.

It disappeared the moment the owner saw the Chinaman looking that way.

The clever Chinese did the first thing that came into his head, which was to ride straight to the door and force his horse to push it open further.

As he did this he was just in time to see something moving at the back of the shanty.

A cracking sound came to his ears, too, and then he knew that there must be a door there.

But instead of dismounting and going inside, he simply waited long enough until his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness of the place, and then he noticed that the part of the shanty that backed against the cliff was boarded over the same as the sides and the front.

Turning his horse around he rode back and went on around to the other side of the shanty.

When he saw how straight the face of the cliff was it occurred to him that it was rather strange that the ranchman should waste so much lumber in boarding up the back of the shanty, when the bare rock would have answered the purpose just as well.

The Chinaman was a keen observer, and he was quick to form conclusions.

He had been with Young Wild West and his partners long enough to take notice of things that he otherwise might not have paid any attention to.

That there was some sort of a door at the back of the shed or shanty he was absolutely certain.

As he rode back, Robinson looked at him directly and said:

"Well, heathen, did you see anything over there that looked like cattle that was stolen from Jamieson?"

"Me no undelstandee," declared Hop, looking at him innocently and shaking his head.

"You don't, eh? Well, you was prying around there. What did you see?"

"Me see um velly biggee shed. Nobody lere," was the reply.

"Well, you didn't expect to find any one there, did you? But I suppose you did think you might see the cattle your friends are looking for."

"Me thlinker maybe me findee um cattle, so be."

"Well, you didn't find them, did you?"

"Lat light, Misler Lobinson. Me no findee."

Hop let his cayuse walk around until he got close to where Wild was sitting on the back of his sorrel stallion.

He waited until Robinson began talking to Jamieson again, and then he leaned over and whispered:

"Misler Wild, me see a man in um shanty. He allee samee go thlough um door in um back of um shanty. Maybe a biggee hole in um glound, so be."

"Maybe there is, Hop," the boy answered, without turning to look at him. "I am glad you went over there. I had an idea you were looking for something."

"Me findee someth'ing allee light," and so saying the Chinaman moved his horse further away and began talking lightly to Cheyenne Charlie and the cowboys.

Our hero was well satisfied that there was no place that the eye could reach where the stolen cattle might be concealed.

But he suggested to Jamieson that they take a ride around before going back.

"Go ahead and look all you want to," called out Robinson, derisively. "The offer I made is good. If you find any cattle here that don't belong to me I will make you a handsome present."

Wild rode straight toward the shanty and, reaching it, he quickly dismounted.

The rascally ranchman and his men followed the rest as they came up.

"The heathen looked in there, but maybe your eyes are better than his, Young Wild West," was the sneering remark from Robinson, as Wild stepped to the door.

It was a big wide door, and when opened there was ample room for two or three cattle to go in abreast.

The boy opened it the full width, and then walked in leisurely.

Cheyenne Charlie dismounted and followed him, and so did Jamieson.

Jim Dart knew that they were probably up against a bad crowd, so he remained outside to watch them.

Robinson waited a few seconds, and then he entered the shanty.

"Well," said he, "do you see anything of your cattle, Jamieson?"

"Not yet," was the reply. "But Young Wild West says there's plenty of hoofprints here."

"Ha! ha! ha! Why shouldn't there be? I often drive a bunch in here, so there is nothing strange in that."

"What do you drive them in here for?" Wild asked, turning to him sharply.

"Well, I suppose that's my business, boy."

"Oh, certainly! But I can't see the necessity of driving cattle in here."

"There's a whole lot of things you can't see, maybe."

"Yes, I have no doubt of that."

The boy was now close to the back part of the shanty, and as there was sufficient light there for him to see things quite plainly, he scanned it closely as he walked along.

"You have got it boarded up here, I see," he observed, as he turned to Robinson, who came up close to him, a peculiar smile on his face.

"Yes, that's right. I suppose you don't know what I did that for."

"Probably to keep the dirt from caving in."

"You have got that right. That's just why it is boarded up."

Just then Hop, who had dismounted outside, came strolling in.

He walked over to where Wild was standing, puffing away at a cigar and acting as though he was not at all interested in what was going on.

But he had marked well the spot where he had seen what he thought was a door moving, and he went straight to it.

Putting his hand in a rather wide crack he gave a push to the left and then, much to the surprise of all hands, a big door moved slowly back, disclosing a dark passage.

Robinson uttered an oath, and then turned to run out of the shanty.

"Hold on, my friend!" Young Wild West exclaimed, as he quickly covered him with a revolver. "You stay right where you are and just keep your mouth tightly closed, too. I reckon we will find the stolen cattle pretty soon now."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CATTLE THIEVES GET AWAY

Robinson's eyes flashed fire when he found himself covered with the revolver Young Wild West held in his hand.

"Shoot me if you dare!" he cried, loudly, paying no attention to the boy's command. "Come, boys, you have got them dead to rights now."

Seeing that the villain was not at all cowed by Wild's sudden action, Cheyenne Charlie leaped forward and with a quick blow sent him staggering.

Spat!

He gave him another before he could recover, and down went Robinson in a heap.

"Hip hi! Lookee outtee, Misler Wild!" cried Hop, excitedly, as he bounded into the cave.

Hurried footsteps could be heard inside, and the young deadshot knew right away that the cattle thieves were hastening that way.

He quickly gave the door a slide and it closed, and then stepping away from it, he called out:

"Charlie, hold that scoundrel a prisoner and watch this door. The moment it opens you can be ready to shoot, but be careful you don't get a bullet yourself."

"Right yer are, Wild!" the scout answered, and then he seized the ranchman by the collar and dragged him toward the back of the shanty.

Hop took his station at the other side of the door and then Wild hurried outside to see how Jim was making out, while Jamieson followed him.

The young deadshot gave a nod of satisfaction when he saw that Jim and the cowboys had the rascals belonging to the band of cattle thieves covered.

"That's all right, boys," he said, with a nod of approval. "We have found where they hide the cattle, anyhow. There's a cave back of this shed. Now, then, the question is, what are we going to do with so many prisoners? Here are four, and Charlie has got the ranchman. There are quite a few in the cave, too, and I reckon we have got to get them all, dead or alive."

"You had better let us go on about our business," said one of the cowboys, shaking his head. "We don't know nothin' about any crooked business here. If there's cattle hid in a cave back there it's somethin' we never knowed nothin' about."

"That sounds very well, but I know you are telling a lie," our hero answered, sharply. "Now, then, you just hold up your hands, for you have got to be made a prisoner, and that's all there is to it."

It happened that he was the only one who had lowered his hands after all had raised them when Jim Dart gave the command.

He quickly put them up again and appeared much frightened. Jim did not wait to be told to do it, but quickly stepped forward and relieved them of their guns.

"Shall I tie their hands, Wild?" he asked, when he had finished this task.

"Never mind about that, Jim. So long as they are not able to shoot I reckon it's all right."

It was at this juncture that a woman came running from the house, which was quite a little distance away.

It was Robinson's wife, as one of the cowboys quickly told our hero.

She was very much excited when she reached the spot, and at once began asking where her husband was.

"Take it easy, madam," Wild said, as he stepped over to her. "I suppose you have known right along that your husband has been receiving stolen cattle here and disposing of them as his own. If you didn't, I will tell you so now."

"You lie if you say anything like that!" the woman exclaimed, her fear leaving her for the time being and a passion showing instead. "My husband is an honest man and he wouldn't do anything wrong."

Wild could tell by the way she acted that she knew all about it, but he was not the sort to quarrel with a female, so he said, coaxingly:

"Please don't take on so now. The best thing you can do is to go right back to the house. We will settle this thing in the proper way."

"I won't go back to the house!" she retorted, angrily, and then she turned and ran to the four cowboys and added:

"What are you standing about here like this for? Don't you know enough to take the part of your employer? Shoot these people down, if they don't go right away."

"They can't do no shootin' jest now, Mrs. Robinson," one of the Jamieson's cowboys said, with a grin. "They ain't got no guns. Young Wild West has seen to that part of it, you know."

"Who is Young Wild West?" she demanded, sharply.

"That's him right there," and the cowboy pointed to our hero.

"Do you mean to say a boy is responsible for all this?"

"I reckon he is."

It was just then that Robinson broke away from the scout and ran out of the shanty.

He had heard his wife's voice and had become desperate.

She at once turned to him and catching him by the shoulder she cried:

"What does this all mean, anyhow, Jack?"

"It means that we're in a whole lot of trouble, Mary," he answered. "Have you got a gun about you?"

"Yes," she cried, and she quickly reached under the apron she wore and drew a revolver.

But before she could hand it to her husband Wild, who still had his gun ready, fired quickly.

The bullet hit the weapon and sent it flying from her hand, and, thinking she had been shot, the ranchman's wife uttered a scream and fell to the ground.

This, of course, drew the attention of all hands, and taking their chances the four cowboys turned and ran around the shanty for their lives.

Robinson forgot all about trying to make his escape, and he dropped upon his knees beside his wife.

But he saw that she was not hurt a bit and quickly assisted her to her feet.

"Go to the house!" he exclaimed. "You can do nothing for us. We have got to fight it out, and that's all there is to it."

Then he turned and ran in the direction the cowboys had taken.

"Hold on there!" cried Wild, starting after him. "Stop right where you are or I will have to put a bullet through your leg, that's all!"

But the villain kept right on running.

Wild fired a shot and the bullet clipped a piece of leather from his boot-heel.

But Robinson only gave a leap and then got around the corner of the shanty.

Five or six more steps were taken by our hero and then he found himself confronted with as many as ten men, some of whom were armed.

Crack! crack!

Two shots were fired, but the boy leaped back in time to escape being shot.

"Look out, boys!" he called out. "The rascals have got out of the cave by another way. There is going to be a hot fight now."

"Whoopee! whoopee! Wow! wow!" came from inside the shanty, and then the scout ran out, a revolver in each hand.

He had heard the words of his young leader, and bent upon lending all the aid he could, he lost no time in getting outside.

Jim and the cowboys quickly ran off to the right a little, so they might get a view of the villains.

They expected to see them run out and fight it out, but instead they were just in time to observe them as they were passing through an opening in the face of the cliff.

Two cowboys fired right away, but just then the opening closed and the ranchman and the cattle thieves had disappeared from view.

"Well, boys," said our hero, when he found out what had happened, "I reckon they have got the best of us for a little while, anyhow. They are all in the cave, and it will be rather dangerous work for us to go in and attack them. But we will find a way to do it, just the same."

"You will find a way to get killed, you meddlesome boy!" Robinson's wife cried, savagely, as she shook her fist at him.

"Easy, madam. Don't fly into such a passion," Wild cautioned, making a motion with his hand. "You had better take your husband's advice and go back to the house. This is no place for a woman."

"I will go back to the house when I get good and ready!" she exclaimed.

But she went that way, just the same, turning every now and then and shaking her fist at her husband's enemies.

"I reckon she'll cool down a little after she gets to her house," observed Cheyenne Charlie, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That woman is a regular she tiger-cat, an' no mistake."

"But yer can't blame her for stickin' up for her husband, though," ventured one of the cowboys.

"No, sartinly not. She's got a perfect right ter do it, but it seems too bad that a woman could have sich a galoot as he is for a husband. Why, Robinson is ther worst one of ther whole gang, an' I'll bet on it."

"And he's been making out that he was sich an honest man, too," observed another of the cowboys, shaking his head. "I'm satisfied that yer can't tell who's who in this part of ther country."

"Or in any other part, for that matter," Jim Dart added, with a smile.

"Well, I suppose that's right. But, anyhow, we know now for a fact that Robinson is a rascal. He'll have ter suffer along with ther rest of ther gang, that's putty sure."

"He'll git his medicine, all right," the scout remarked, a

grim smile showing on his face. "If he lives to be took alive, ther sheriff will take care of him. But it sorter seems ter me by ther way things is goin' that he won't live long enough for that. He's one of ther kind of galoots what will fight to ther end, an' if there's goin' ter be a fight he's sartin ter git ther worst of it. We never let ourselves git whipped, you know."

Wild heard what the scout said, but he paid little or no attention to it.

He was doing a lot of thinking just then.

He knew quite well that the cattle thieves would be able to hold the cave a long time, for it would be nothing more than suicide to enter it and try to attack them.

It was so dark in there that they would prove easy targets the moment they started to rush in, and they would not be able to see the villains until they had a good chance to fire upon them.

The young deadshot beckoned for his two partners to come with him, and then he went to the door of the shanty.

"Boys," said he, shaking his head, doubtingly, "this is what I call a pretty tough state of affairs. The secret door here is certainly guarded and so must be the other entrance. That means that we don't dare to try and get in by either. I wonder if there is no other way to get into that cave?"

"Maybe we could make a way," suggested Jim Dart.

"I was thinking of that, Jim, but we have no means of doing it. If we had a couple of sticks of dynamite it might be easy to blow a hole somewhere. The explosion would create confusion in the ranks of the scoundrels inside, and we might be able to rush in and surprise them before they knew what was coming. But where can we get dynamite?"

"Yer can't git none short of fifty miles from here," Jamieson spoke up, for he was listening to what was said.

"Well, we won't think anything more about that, then. I reckon we had better consult Hop."

The Chinaman was called, and when he found out what was needed he smiled blandly and said:

"Maybe me go to um top of um cliff and find lillee hole, so be, Misler Wild. Len me chuckee biggee fireclacker down, so be."

"Well, that might help a little, Hop. There certainly must be an opening to admit air into the cave. I will go with you and we will soon find out."

The boy looked to the right and left, and when he found that they would have to travel more than a quarter of a mile before they could find a spot that could be climbed easily, he ran to his horse and quickly swung himself into the saddle.

"Come on, Hop," he called out. "The rest will stay here until we come back."

The Chinaman quickly mounted his cayuse and rode after the young deadshot.

In less than a minute they reached a spot where they could ride on up to the top of the high elevation.

Once at the top they found it comparatively smooth, and then they turned and rode back at a canter.

When they came to a halt and dismounted they were less than a hundred feet from their companions below.

Cheyenne Charlie gave a nod of satisfaction and called out:

"I reckon we'll git 'em now, Wild. Go ahead with your game."

The young deadshot waved his hand and then began looking about the ground.

He knew there certainly must be a fissure somewhere, and he was right, too, for in less than two minutes he found one.

But it did not run down straight, so he could not tell whether it extended all the way to the natural ceiling in the cave below.

But he meant to find out, and selecting two or three stones that lay upon the ground he tossed them into the fissure.

Down they rolled, and as he listened he heard them drop upon the rocky ground below.

"That's all right, Hop," he said. "Now, then, just get the biggest cracker you have with you and touch a match to it."

Hop gave a nod and quickly did as he was told.

When he had lighted the fuse of the cracker he threw it into the fissure.

There was a short interval of silence, and then a dull explosion sounded.

"Hip hi! hoolay!" the Chinaman shouted, dancing about and waving his hands to those below.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart had been waiting for the explosion to occur, and the moment it did they rushed into the shanty, followed by the cowboys.

Without any hesitation the scout swung the sliding door back and rushed into the cave

He could hear the sounds of hurrying footsteps, and there was quite a little smoke there.

But nothing could be seen of the cattle thieves.

Bent upon capturing the scoundrels, the scout led the way through the semi-darkness that prevailed.

The next minute they caught sight of a light off to the right, and then it occurred to them that there must be still another opening to the cave.

As they ran that way they saw the forms of several men running swiftly toward the opening.

Crack! crack!

Charlie and Jim both fired, and a yell of pain was the result.

But the hurrying footsteps continued, and soon the clatter of hoofs sounded, though rather faintly.

"They must have had horses in there, an' they've got away," Charlie declared, turning to Jim. "Come on. Let's find out."

It did not take them long to reach the opening, which was a wide passage that was not more than thirty or forty feet in length.

It led outside into a lot of thick bushes, which had been trampled down quite recently, as they could see.

Jim turned sharply to the left and ascended to the top of a big rock.

Then it was that they caught sight of several horsemen just as they disappeared around a bend in a gully.

"It's too bad," he cried, turning to the scout and the cowboys. "They have got away. I think nearly all of them were there, too."

"All but one," one of the cowboys answered. "He's dead by this time, 'cause I stumbled over him as I run through, an' I stopped long enough ter see that he was done for."

Meanwhile, Wild and Hop had caught sight of the villains as they were riding away.

But it was only a glance they got of them, for they disappeared so quickly that they could not even count them.

Our hero was well satisfied, however, that the whole bunch had made their escape.

He mounted his horse and rode in the direction they had taken, but soon found that it would be impossible to descend and take the trail.

They must go down by the way they had come up, and then ride fully a mile before they could get to the other side of the ridge.

They were not long in getting down to the level ground again, and then they turned and rode around to the shanty.

"Well, Hop," said our hero, coolly, "I suppose there is really no need of hurrying now, for they have got such a start of us that they will have a chance to hide somewhere. We will wait till the rest come out, and then we'll start in pursuit."

"Lat light, Misler Wild," was the Chinaman's reply. "Lis velly bad, so be. We no ketchec um cattle thieves."

Pretty soon Jamieson came running from the cave.

He was followed by the cowboys and Wild's partners.

"Who would ever have thought of sich a thing as a cave bein' here, Young Wild West?" the ranchman declared. "No wonder Robinson worked his game so well. I was sartin that ther cattle I kept losin' all ther time was driven over here, an' now I know it for a fact."

"That's right, Mr. Jamieson. But the villains certainly fooled us nicely. I had no idea there were so many ways to get in and out of that cave. But it's all right. We will get them, and before night, too. They won't ride very far, for Robinson is hardly the man to quit his own property. That fellow is a fighter, even if he is a sheming scoundrel."

"Well, I think I'll send a man ter git some help, an' then we'll scour ther whole country till we git 'em."

"All right, you can do that if you like. But I think we will have them before the help arrives."

Jamieson hurriedly selected one of the cowboys and bade him go to the nearest ranch and get all the help he could, and then start on their own hook in search of the cattle thieves.

CHAPTER VII.

A CROSS-FIRE IS PLANNED

While it may seem to have been a clever move that the cattle thieves made, it was really what could have been expected, since there were three ways to get in and out of the cave where the stolen steers were kept and Mike Jager and his men made their headquarters.

When the four cowboys and their boss succeeded in getting

around the corner of the shanty it was a pretty sure thing that all hands were safe for the time being.

The secret entrance near that side had been opened, and two of Jager's men had been on the watch.

Of course, they urged the fugitives to hurry, and then called to their companions.

The result was that they were able to fire a volley, as our friends appeared in view.

But since none of their shots took effect, their powder had simply been wasted.

Once they were all inside, the entrance was closed and then men were stationed there and at the door at the rear of the shanty.

They felt that they could hold the cave until Young Wild West grew desperate and tried to force the entrance.

Then it would be easy to shoot him and his companions down.

But when the cracker fell near three or four of them and exploded with a loud report, they became demoralized and their only thought was to get out of the cave.

Robinson was more cool than the rest, but he felt that they were in danger of being killed by an explosion, so he shouted for them to hurry out by the way they drove the cattle when starting them on the way to the railroad.

The villains kept plenty of horses in the cave, and some of them had been saddled, for they had expected to dash out and make short work of Young Wild West and those who were with him.

Robinson, of course, knew where the horses were, and he shouted for the cowboys who had rushed in with him to hurry and get to them.

"Each one of you get a bridle on a horse and come on. We haven't a second to lose!" he cried.

They all managed to do this save one, who was shot when Cheyenne Charlie fired.

Once outside they galloped away and succeeded in making their escape.

If ever there was a man who was enraged it was Mike Jager. He stormed and swore until Robinson was forced to stop him.

"Don't act like a fool, Mike," the ranchman said, shaking his head. "They haven't beaten us yet. Don't think for an instant that they will, either, for I consider that I am clever enough to get the best of them. As it stands now we are all marked men. But that don't mean that we are going to die for it. There is only one thing to do, and that is to get our revenge and then leave these parts. We must lead Young Wild West and the rest away far enough so I can get back to the house and get my wife. She has stuck to me through it all and I will die before I will leave her now. There is a good hiding-place in the ravine to the north of us, and we will go there now. You all know the cave I speak of."

"All right," Jager answered. "But I'll give yer my word, Jack, that I'll be perfectly willin' ter die tryin' ter git square with Young Wild West. I don't mean ter leave these parts till I've got him, either."

"All right, we'll see to that later on. Perhaps I can arrange a scheme that will settle the whole thing in a hurry. There is one thing certain about it. We won't dare to meet them in an open fire. They can shoot better than we can, I think. We have lost one man already, and I am sorry for it. But it can't be helped."

"We'll avenge him, all right," one of the others declared.

They knew just where they wanted to go, and being well acquainted with that part of the country, they rode on and finally turned to the left and were soon heading almost due north.

That they would be pursued they knew quite well.

But they did not try to hide their trail.

The fact was that the ground was so hard and stony that the hoofprints of their horses could not be seen only in places, and this meant that it would be rather difficult to follow them.

They kept on riding for half an hour, and as their horses had been put through a hard test, they paused long enough to give them a breathing spell.

Then they started again, and at length struck the ravine through which our friends had come that morning on their way to Jamieson's ranch.

A mile through this and the cave the ranchman had spoken of was reached.

It was at this point that the ravine broadened out considerably.

Rocks were scattered all around, some of them being very high.

Among these the ranchman rode, with Mike Jager at his side, and when they reached the face of a cliff they continued on a few yards, and then entered a fissure that was barely wide enough to permit them to ride in single file.

Through this they went for several yards, and then a wide opening to a dark cave was disclosed on the left.

Robinson knew exactly where he was going, so without any hesitation he rode in, the rest following.

It was simply one of the many caves that exist in that part of the country, and though it was very dark in there, the ranchman kept on until he could no longer see the light from the entrance.

Then he dismounted, and striking a match, began looking around, keeping hold of the bridle-rein of his horse meanwhile.

He soon gave a nod of satisfaction, for close to him on the left was a jagged, irregular, natural wall of rock, and hanging to a little split was a lantern.

He quickly secured this and lighted it and then the rest came up and dismounted.

"Now, then, boys," said Robinson, coolly, "I want you to all stay here but Mike. He will go with me to the ranch, so I can get my wife away. There won't be any one there now, for they are all following our trail. Come, Mike, are you ready?"

"Yes, I am ready, Jack, but my horse is putty tired, an' yours must be, too."

"We can't help that. We will find more horses when we get to the ranch."

"All right, but you ain't goin' ter go ther same way we come, are yer?"

"Certainly not. We don't want to meet our enemies, do we? We'll let them search a while, and when I get back I'll put up a job that will clean them out in a hurry. Come on, we'll go on through to the other side of the ridge and then we'll make a short cut for the ranch."

"I never went that way afore, Jack, but you have, so you know whether it's all right or not."

"I know it's all right. I would have come this way only that we are forced to go so far around. There will be plenty of chances to hide ourselves should we see Young Wild West and his gang approaching, so don't fear on that score."

The cave had never been occupied by the gang before, so there was nothing there to afford the least comfort.

But they all felt that they were secure, and this comforted them slightly, no doubt.

Robinson now found another lantern, which he lighted, and then leading his horse straight across the wide, underground place, he called Mike to follow him.

Jager no doubt would rather have stayed, but the ranchman was boss, so he went on with him.

In less than a couple of minutes they came to a wide passage and saw a light ahead.

As they walked on out, leading their horses, Robinson extinguished the lantern and hung it close to the entrance.

"We'll need that when we come back, for we will come this way. It seems rather hard to be forced to leave your own ranch, Mike, but it has got to be done. I know what I will get if I don't do it. But I want my wife with me, and as soon as we have settled accounts with Young Wild West I am going to ride away with her and seek another place where we may live in safety. I have quite a few dollars in the house and, of course, I will take the money with me. We will also take a few things we can carry, for I think we will have time to load a pack-horse."

"Where do I come in on this game, Jack?" Jager asked, shrugging his shoulders. "You have got a few dollars saved up, but I ain't."

"Well, that's your own fault if you haven't. But I won't be mean with you. I will give you a couple of hundred to start you off."

"All right; that's ther way ter talk. I feel better now," and the villain showed that he was much pleased.

It might have been a shorter cut to Robinson's ranch, but the way was much rougher, and they were forced to ride along rather slowly.

It was well toward noon when they finally rode up to the place from a point that was almost opposite to the shanty that covered the entrance to the cave.

No one was to be seen about the premises, and it was not until they dismounted in a clump of trees near the house and ventured out on foot that the ranchman's wife came out of the house.

She recognized them instantly, and waving her hands with delight she started to meet her husband.

The two embraced, while Jager looked on in sympathy.

"We have got to leave here forever, Mary," Robinson said, shaking his head, sadly. "But I suppose it should have been expected. I have worked a dangerous game for a long time, and I have made money by it. Now, then, we must go. But I was clever enough to have the place mortgaged for all it is worth, so we really won't lose a lot, after all. But anything is better than me being sent to prison and being separated from you."

"You know what's best," she declared, smiling between her tears.

The three went to the house, quickly, and the result of it was that an hour later they rode away, taking with them two pack-horses that were loaded with the articles the woman wanted to take with her.

Jager received his promised hundred dollars, and with several thousand concealed on different parts of his person, Robinson felt that the situation was not such a bad one after all.

Back they went to the cave where the cattle thieves were in hiding, not meeting with any one on the way.

This seemed rather strange, too, since by this time another party was out searching for the scoundrels.

But it happened that they did not come around that way just then, and Robinson was still in luck.

The men who had been waiting so long were very glad when they came, and eager to find out what would be the next move, they crowded around the ranchman.

"Boys," he said, "the first thing to do is to fit up a cosy little place near the entrance for my wife. There is no telling just how long we may have to stay here. Of course, I don't think it will be any longer than to-night some time, for that is when I expect to get away. While you are doing this I will think a little and hatch up a way to defeat our enemies."

"An' kill Young Wild West!" added Mike Jager, his eyes flashing in the light of the lantern that hung near at hand.

"Of course, Mike. That is the principal thing we want to accomplish."

"All right, then; go ahead."

Jager lent his assistance, and in due time a place was fixed up where the woman might make herself as comfortable as she could, under the circumstances.

Meanwhile, Robinson had been out to the ravine.

When he came back his face wore a satisfied smile.

"Well, boys, they've been through this way, which shows that they must have found our trail and followed us. But they failed to find this cave. But there is nothing strange about that, since it is pretty well hidden and there are so many rocks that there was no chance for us to leave any hoofprints. Now, then, I am going to fix up a plan to clean them out. Right above here the ravine is very narrow, and the sides are quite steep. What we want to do is to divide ourselves into two parties and lie concealed on either side at the top. There are rocks enough there to hide ourselves. Then all we will have to do will be to wait until Young Wild West and his friends ride through. I rather think that a sudden cross-fire will soon clean them out."

"Hooray!" cried Jager, but the ranchman quickly clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Not so loud, Mike," he declared. "Don't you know that some of them may be near at hand at this very moment? You have got to be more cautious than that or our plan may not succeed."

"Well, when you spoke about ther cross-fire I couldn't help it. But it's all right, Jack. We're goin' ter be winners. Ther cross-fire will sartinly clean 'em out in short order, 'cause they won't have a chance, no matter which way they turn ter go."

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD FOILS THE VILLAINS

Young Wild West was just about to ride away with his partners and the men with them when Hop called his attention to two riders who were coming that way across the level stretch to the right.

The instant the boy's eyes lighted upon them he recognized Arietta as being one of them.

The other was neither Anna or Eloise, so he guessed she must be the ranchman's daughter.

"Mr. Jamieson," said he, nodding to the ranchman, "here comes a couple to help us."

"Thunder!" Jamieson ejaculated, as he looked at the two

girls who were riding at a swift gallop toward them. "That's Nell an' one of your gals, Young Wild West."

"That's right, but I reckon it will be all right. Arietta knows how to shoot pretty well, and if we need assistance she will be right on hand."

"Well, Nell kin shoot some, too, but I reckon I don't want her ter git close enough for anything like that. She's a mighty darin' gal, but that don't say that she has got ter git in a fight with cattle thieves."

"Well, they can keep behind at a safe distance, and then there will be no danger. We may as well wait until they come up now, and then we will ride around to the place where the scoundrels got out of the cave and take the trail."

"All right, Young Wild West, but I'm sorry ther gals had ter come here. Maybe I kin git Nell ter go back."

It was not long before Arietta and the ranchman's daughter rode up.

Their cheeks glowed, and their eyes were bright from the morning ride they had taken and both appeared to be in fine spirits.

"What did yer come after us for, Nell?" Jamieson asked.

"Only for a ride, dad," was the reply. "Arietta thought it would be a good idea to follow you up and see how you were making out. Have you learned anything yet?"

"A whole lot, I reckon. We've found out that Robinson was hidin' ther stolen cattle in a cave that's behind ther shanty over there. Ther whole gang of cattle thieves has got away, though, an' Robinson is with 'em. What we're goin' ter do now is ter foller ther trail an' try an ketch 'em."

"We can be of some help, then," Arietta spoke up, with a smile.

"Not much, I reckon, 'cause you gals has got ter stay behind," and Jamieson acted as though he was positive on that point.

"I knew you wouldn't be offended when you saw me, Wild," Arietta declared, as she rode alongside her dashing young lover. "I couldn't resist the temptation to ride out and see how you were making out. Now, then, I'll help you all I can to catch the cattle thieves. You know well enough that I will do plenty of shooting if there is any need of it."

"I know that, Et," was the reply, "but I hope you won't have to take part in the game to that extent. It's too bad the scoundrels got away from us, but there were so many ways to get in and out of the cave that they fooled us. Come on."

As the boy started his sorrel ahead, Arietta rode along at his side.

But the ranchman quickly called out:

"Hold on, gal! You're goin' ter ride a little behind with me an' Nell. There ain't no tellin' jest how soon we might run into an ambush, an' it wouldn't be very nice for you to be right at ther front if that happens."

"Go back there with him, Et," our hero advised.

"All right," was the reply, and then she quickly turned and rode to the rear.

Hop was there, too, for since he never did any real fighting, there was no necessity of his being anywhere in the lead.

Wild and his partners rode on around until they found a way to get to the other side of the ridge, the cowboys following them closely.

It did not take them long to find the trail, and then they pressed on, hoping to soon overtake the villains.

In spite of the fact that in some places the ground was so hard that the prints of horses' hoofs failed to show, Wild and his partners managed to keep upon it.

Whenever they lost it they spread out and one of them was sure to find it again.

In this way they kept on until finally they came to the ravine they had camped in the night before.

"So they went this way, did they?" our hero said, as he nodded to Cheyenne Charlie, who happened to be close at his side at the time. "Well, we knew a little about this ravine, but I think we'll have to keep our eyes open or the first thing we know bullets will be whistling about our heads. We'll ride along a couple of miles, and then I reckon I'll dismount and climb to the top of the cliff and take a look around. I might be able to find out something."

"Right yer are, Wild," the scout answered, with a nod of approval. "You know what's right every time, an' there ain't no mistake about it."

Word was passed for the cowboys to keep a sharp lookout, and then they rode on at a canter, watching the ground as they went, so they would be able to tell if the fugitives had halted.

They went along for just about two miles, and then Wild decided it was time to do a little scouting.

He felt sure that the cattle thieves had taken through the ravine for the very purpose of ambushing them, and for that reason he was not going to ride straight ahead and run the risk.

Leaving his horse in charge of Arietta, the boy, after telling his companions to remain there until they heard from him or saw him returning, found a way to get to the top of the cliff on the right.

Good luck usually followed Young Wild West, anyhow, and it was so in this case.

The spot where he had halted was not more than three hundred yards from the cave Robinson and his gang had taken refuge in.

Wild had taken the right side, too, and though he might not be able to find it without a clew, he was heading straight toward it.

The boy walked along rapidly, picking his way through the bushes and dodging behind the rocks, so that in case the villains were hiding close at hand they would not be able to see him.

He did not come to a halt until suddenly he heard low voices that seemed to come from directly under his feet.

Instantly the boy's attention was aroused.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "I reckon I have hit it just right. Some one is below me."

There was a crack of about a foot in width almost at his feet, and he had been about to step over it when he first heard the sounds, but had dropped back to listen.

He now dropped upon his hands and knees and looked downward.

Though the light penetrated all the way to the bottom he was unable to observe the forms of any one.

But the voices could be heard plainly now.

When he discovered that one of them was a woman's, he was not a little surprised.

At first he was unable to imagine who it could be, but when he realized that they had been a long time in getting there, since they had been compelled to stop so many times to pick up the trail, it occurred to him that probably Robinson had gone back by a short-cut and got his wife.

There was no other way for him to figure it out, for he was well satisfied that the cattle thieves were directly below him in a cave.

The woman was doing most of the talking now, and her voice was raised to a rather high pitch.

She appeared to be in fear of something, and when Wild heard her ask some one if he thought they would surely get away in safety, he listened for the reply.

"Don't you worry a bit," he heard a man say, and then he recognized the voice as belonging to Robinson. "But don't talk so loud, for there's no tellin' but that Young Wild West or his partners might be around somewhere. They're mighty clever, and most likely will fear that we're lying for them in ambush. If they do fear that they are just right, for I am going to divide the men in two parties. One will go to the top of the cliff on this side and lie behind boulders, while the other will get to the other side. Then when they come along we'll rain a cross-fire on them. If Young Wild West and his partners don't drop from their horses in a jiffy, I will be very much mistaken."

"You mustn't let any of them escape," the woman declared, and Wild shrugged his shoulders when he heard the words. "If you do, they will surely follow us, and then we will be taken. We must get away, Jack, though it is hard to leave the ranch."

"Well, if I don't leave it, most likely I'll die, and it's a great deal better to live, no matter where you have got to go, my dear," was the reply.

"Oh, yes, I am satisfied to go anywhere with you, Jack."

"Well, I don't blame you for sticking to your husband," Wild thought, "but you are certainly a pretty hard customer for a woman. But it's all right. I know what you people are up to now, and I reckon I'll escape the cross-fire. It's a lucky thing I happened to choose the right side of the ravine, for if I had gone up to the left I would have missed hearing what you were up to. Well, I reckon it won't be long before we'll have this thing over with."

The boy listened and presently he heard several men talking in low tones.

Then Robinson said, quite loud enough for him to hear:

"Now then, boys, go ahead and do as I have told you. Keep a sharp watch, for they ought to be here at any time now, if they have managed to follow the trail."

"They follered it, all right, an' don't yer forgit it," Mike Jager answered, Wild recognizing the villain's voice instantly.

"Go on out, then, and do just as it has been arranged. I will stay at the entrance with my wife. It wouldn't do for me to leave her here alone, boys. But you can rest assured, if it becomes necessary, that I will do my share of the fighting."

"We know that, Jack. It's all right. Come on, boys."

Then Wild heard the footsteps of several men, and in less than three minutes all was silent.

He now crept to the edge of the cliff and took the risk of peering over.

He saw the cattle thieves, three of whom were redskins, though attired in the fashion of white men, picking their way along through the ravine as though they were afraid they might be observed by some one.

Wild counted them and found there were ten of them, and when they got a little further along he saw them divide, half going to the other side, where there was a slope that would permit them to climb to the top.

He was unable to see just where the others went up, but satisfied that they would not have to go very far before they found a way to do it, he started along, with the intention of locating the exact spot where they intended to lie in ambush.

It was easy for the boy to pick his way along, and without making a sound he proceeded.

He found it necessary to climb over a high elevation in order to do so, and when he reached the top he turned and looked back and was able to see the ranchman, the Chinaman and the two girls, who stood upon the ground near the horses.

His partners and the cowboys were further toward him and a projection of rock hid them from his view.

The boy could not resist the temptation to wave his hat and attract the attention of his sweetheart, and he had not waved it more than two or three times before she saw him and answered.

Much pleased at the success of his venture, Wild now went on down the side of the rise and after moving cautiously through the bushes for a distance of a couple of hundred feet, he heard low voices ahead of him.

He was nearing the five villains who were to occupy that side of the ravine and, bound to get close enough to hear what they were talking about, he went on.

In another minute he had covered the distance, and then as he peered between two rocks that were almost square in shape, he saw the five sitting behind a few rocks that were directly at the edge of the cliff, which was quite steep there.

They all had rifles, and by their manner they seemed to be ready for business.

Wild gripped his revolver.

He felt like dashing toward them and forcing them to hold up their hands, but decided that it would be better to wait and get the assistance of his partners and the cowboys before attempting such a thing.

He was not more than twenty feet from them, and as he turned to go his foot loosened a stone and sent it rolling directly toward the villains.

He knew he would be discovered, so he turned and ran.

Crack!

One of the villains saw him and fired a shot, but the bullet went wide of the mark, and Wild ran on.

But luck was against him just then, for in his hurry to get away he made a misstep and fell.

By the time he got upon his feet he saw two men within ten feet of him, and both were covering him with their revolvers.

"We've got yer, Young Wild West!" one of them, who was no other than Mike Jager, said, triumphantly. "Hold up your hands or we'll shoot yer."

The revolver had fallen from the boy's hand when he tripped, and there was no alternative but to obey.

"One of yer run down an' tell ther boss that we've got Young Wild West," Jager said, hurriedly, as he turned to those behind him.

"All right," came the reply, and then Wild heard one of them running swiftly along the edge of the cliff.

The young deadshot had braced himself, for he did not mean to give up.

But with his hands over his head the villains thought he had done so.

As they stepped up to seize him he suddenly dropped his hands and then shot out his right fist, catching one of them squarely on the jaw.

Before Jager knew what had happened he received a punch in the stomach that took his breath away and sent him rolling down the slight descent.

Then Wild turned and ran up the hill.

Crack! crack!

One of the bullets clipped a lock of hair from his head, and at the same instant he stumbled again, for he was now going down hill and his speed was such that he could not check himself.

Over and over he rolled, and by the time his pursuers reached the top he had disappeared in the bushes a dozen yards below.

The boy felt for his other revolver, but when he found it was gone he knew that when he tumbled it must have dropped from the holster.

He was in a bad way, but he was not going to let the scoundrels take him, even though he was unable to do any shooting.

On he ran, taking care to dodge behind the rocks and bushes he came upon, and when he had gone a hundred yards he paused long enough to satisfy himself that his pursuers had stopped.

He was pretty close to the edge of the cliff now, and taking the risk of looking in the direction of his friends to see what they were doing, he was astounded to see Arietta riding swiftly that way, carrying a flag of truce.

"What is she up to now, I wonder?" he thought. "But I must stop her. The scoundrels will surely fire on her if she gets between them."

The bank was quite steep there, so without any hesitation the boy undertook to make a descent, and down he went, sliding and clutching at the bushes he came in contact with.

As he reached the top of a big rock within a few feet of the bottom of the ravine Arietta came dashing past.

"Come back, Et!" shouted Wild, as he ran down the bank.

The girl heard him and quickly reining in her horse she turned and galloped back.

The baffled villains fired a volley.

CHAPTER IX.

HOT FIGHTING

The moment Arietta heard the shot that was fired at Wild, she turned to the ranchman and said:

"They've got him, Mr. Jamieson. I must stop them from taking his life."

"What are yer goin' ter do, gal?" the ranchman cried, in surprise.

"I will ride up the ravine with a flag of truce. That will prevent them from killing Wild," she answered. "We have no chance to get up there in time to prevent it any other way. Nell, let me have that white waist you have on—quick!"

The ranchman's daughter was far more cool than he was, and she quickly tore off the garment and handed it to Arietta.

"Give me that stick there!" the girl cried, hurriedly.

There was one that just suited her purpose lying on the ground, and when it had been handed to her she quickly tied her flag of truce to it and then, without another word, galloped through the ravine.

Meanwhile, Charlie and Jim were undecided what to do.

They heard the firing and realized that Wild had got into danger.

"Climb up there," Arietta called out, pointing to the right side of the ravine.

That was quite enough.

They all dismounted and hurriedly ran to find a place where they could ascend.

Bent upon saving the life of her young lover, the brave girl dashed on.

But fortunately she heard the voice of Wild, and, as has been recorded, she turned quickly and dashed back.

She could hear the bullets whistling over her head, but she did not seem to mind it in the least.

Reining in her horse as she came to a turn, she waited for Wild to come up.

"Go right on, Et!" he called out. "I reckon I can manage all right. They haven't got their horses, so they won't get here in a hurry."

"Whoopee! whoopee! Wow! wow!" came from above them, and then Cheyenne Charlie was seen leaning over a big rock at the top.

"Go right on, boys, but be careful," our hero called out. "Half of them are on this side and the other half on the other. They planned a cross-fire, and we have escaped it."

The scout heard, as did the rest, and they promptly ran on, keeping a sharp watch ahead.

It seemed that the two men who had started in pursuit of Wild did not go very far, after Jager and the other fellow were knocked down.

They did not know that he had lost his revolver and were afraid of being shot if they followed him to the foot of the descent, so they all went back to their place of concealment, expecting the young deadshot's companions to ride through the ravine.

Those at the other side signalled to them when they saw Arietta approaching, but it amounted to nothing, and they fired without effect.

The four were still crouching there when Cheyenne Charlie, followed by Jim Dart and the cowboys, suddenly came upon them.

Half a dozen shots were fired, but our friends did the most of the shooting, and when the smoke cleared away the four men were lying upon the ground.

"That's some of 'em, anyhow," declared the scout, nodding his head with satisfaction. "Now, then, look out for ther other bunch."

Those on the other side knew about what had happened, and becoming terror-stricken, they concluded to get down and reach the cave as quickly as possible.

Just as Charlie was thinking about finding a way to get down, they appeared.

"There they are, boys!" he shouted. "Give it to 'em!"

The cowboys scarcely needed to be told to shoot.

Though they were only armed with revolvers, the distance was short and they began firing rapidly.

The cattle thieves tried their best to get away, but it was no use.

They fired back, but their aim was bad, and in less than two minutes they were done for.

"Whoopee! whoopee! Wow! wow! wow!" shouted the scout, waving his hat. "This is what I call gittin' 'em in great shape, boys. Now, then, let's find a way ter git down. We ain't got 'em all yet, 'cause I've been watchin' for Robinson, an' I ain't seen him."

Meanwhile, the villain Jager had dispatched to tell the ranchman what had happened above, the clatter of hoofs came to their ears.

The villain did not think of going out, then, of course, but remained with Robinson and his wife.

The rascally ranchman's face was very pale, but he was still determined to win out and make his escape.

"Stand ready to let the boys in," he said to the man, who was crouching in fear close to the entrance. "They will be here in a jiffy."

But he was mistaken in this, for presently not a sound could be heard.

The number of shots that had been fired told Robinson plainly that there had been a bad fight.

He was not willing to admit that it had gone against his men.

However, when ten minutes had passed since the last shot had been heard he began to grow very uneasy.

His wife was crouching upon the ground, the picture of despair.

The dim light that came through the crack overhead fell upon her face, and as he turned and looked at her, Robinson shook his head.

"Keep up your courage," he said, as he touched her on the head. "We haven't been caught yet. They'll never find us here. If we can't do any better we will stay here until it gets good and dark, and then we'll ride away. Maybe they've either killed or caught the rest of the gang, and if they have it can't be helped. But we're going to get away. Just keep on thinkin' that, and everything will turn out all right."

She tried to smile, but it was a vain attempt, for the woman was so dejected now that words of comfort did little for her.

If she had known that Young Wild West knew exactly where they were hiding she might have thrown herself upon the ground and cried in despair.

But it was not long before the critical moment arrived, as far as she was concerned, especially.

When he had satisfied himself that all the villains but the ranchman and the man who had been dispatched to let him

know of his capture, Wild set out to find a way to get inside the cave.

In his hurry he had failed to mark the spot, so it was necessary to go to the top of the cliff and make his way along to the crack again.

He arrived there in time to hear Robinson speaking encouragingly to his wife.

But when he peered down he was unable to see them, since the crack did not run in a straight form.

Creeping noiselessly to the edge of the steep bank, he looked downward, and marking the spot well, he turned and went back.

His partners and the cowboys were waiting for him, with the ranchman, the girls and the Chinaman.

"There are three of them left," Wild said, nodding his head and smiling. "But one of them is a woman, and we must be careful that she is not harmed. Robinson has his wife with him in the cave. Remember, boys, that the ranchman must be taken alive. The man with him will fall an easy victim, for he is badly frightened, since he no doubt feels that his companions have been shot. Charlie, you and Jim will go with me. I reckon that will be enough."

"Right yer are, Wild!" the scout exclaimed, while Jim gave a nod of satisfaction.

"We kin all foller yer an' stay outside, can't we?" one of the cowboys asked.

"Yes; come on, though you want to be careful and not get shot, for we are not going to give them a chance to hit us, you know."

When they were pretty near the spot Wild had marked he motioned for the rest to stay where they were, and then he and Charlie stepped softly to the face of the cliff.

Just where the entrance was they did not know, for there was nothing that looked like one.

But it was there our hero knew.

He scanned the face of the cliff closely and finally he selected a crack as being the place to operate on.

But on second thought he decided to use a little strategy, since it might be impossible to break their way in.

"Charlie," said he, in a whisper, as he stepped to the side of the scout, "I reckon you have got to pose as one of the cattle thieves now. You just step up there softly and give a knock with the butt of your gun. Tell those inside to let you in. You can disguise your voice sufficiently enough to fool them, I think."

"I reckon I kin, Wild," and without waiting for any further instructions, the scout stepped over and struck the face of the rock two blows with the butt of his revolver.

"Hurry up an' let me in," he said, hoarsely.

There was no reply.

Wild was listening sharply, and when he detected a slight sound on the other side of the rock it occurred to him that the scout's voice had not deceived Robinson.

"Try it again, Charlie," he whispered.

"Hurry up an' let me in!" the scout called out.

But it would not work.

"Well, I reckon we have got to try different tactics," said our hero, nodding his head, coolly. "Where is Hop?"

The clever Chinnee was right there, for he was bound to see the end of the adventure.

"Whattée wantee, Mislér Wild?" he asked, as he stepped up and lookd expectantly at the young deadshot.

"There is a passage right here that is cleverly covered, Hop," was the reply. "I want you to blow it open."

"Allee light, Mislér Wild, me do lat velly nicee, so be."

"Well, get right at it, for there must be another way to get in and out of the cave."

The Chinaman promptly began making an examination of the almost perpendicular rock.

Like Wild, he decided that the crack had something to do with the door, if there really was such a thing there.

He thrust the blade of a hunting-knife in it and found that there was nothing to stop it as far as it would reach.

Wild proceeded to make a closer examination, too.

Four feet to the left of the crack a mass of trailing vines hung down.

The vines appeared to be very innocent and were such as is frequently found on the faces of cliffs.

But when the boy pushed them aside he saw the entrance all right.

What appeared to be a big boulder was pressing against the solid rock, effectually closing the opening.

"Never mind. Hop," he said, as he saw the Celestial mixing up some gunpowder and other chemicals. "I reckon we can force this rock in."

"Allee light, Miler Wild," came the familiar reply.

"Come, Charlie, let's see how strong you are," the young deadshot observed, as he nodded to the scout.

The two quickly swung their weight against the boulder.

It moved slightly, but did not give way.

Jim and one of the cowboys then lent their aid, and in went the obstruction, which was nothing more than a rather thin piece of rock, after all.

There was the passage, but there was no one there!

CHAPTER X.

THE FINISH.

Robinson thought sure some of his men were coming when he heard footsteps outside.

But when Cheyenne Charlie called out after striking upon the rock with the butt of his revolver, he knew right away that it was not one of the gang.

"We have got to get out of here," he said, taking his wife by the arm. "Young Wild West is outside. Come! Just keep up your courage and everything will be all right yet. I am not going to give in until I find there is no longer a chance."

She looked at him and shuddered.

It was plain that the woman thought there was no chance. But she permitted him to lead her back into the cave.

The horse-thief came after them, treading lightly.

"Which way, boss?" he asked, as he tremblingly reached the side of the villainous ranchman.

"We must find a hiding-place and then wait until dark," was the reply.

"But they'll soon be in here, won't they?"

"Yes, but what matters it? There are plenty of places to find. We will get three of the horses and take them with us."

Robinson's wife cheered up slightly when she heard him talking in such a hopeful way.

The horse-thief seemed to feel better, too, and he went with them to get the horses.

Once they had them they hurried on through the cave.

"We will go out, for I know of another place close by where there is room for the horses and ourselves," the villain said. "To-night, when it gets good and dark, we will ride away and begin life anew in some other place."

"And be honest about it," the wife declared, eagerly.

"Yes, if that will suit you better. But I will never feel content so long as I know Young Wild West is living."

"You fear that he might find us, no matter where we go?"

"No, not that. I feel that I owe him a grudge that can only be paid with his life."

"Don't think that way. Let well enough alone. If we can manage to escape you should be satisfied."

"I suppose that's right. But I am not that kind of a man. I long for revenge. It is all due to the boy they call Young Wild West that we are in such trouble. No one but he could have dreamed that there was a cave behind the shed. I tell you I will never be satisfied until he is dead!"

"Better let him alone for awhile," suggested the cattle thief, who had now become quite calm.

"Oh, I don't mean to look for him until I have taken my wife to a safe place," was the reply.

"You know what happened to ther rest of ther gang, boss."

"Well, I am not sure that they were all caught yet."

"But it's putty sartin that they got their medicine. All that shootin' wasn't for nothin', you kin bet!"

"Some of Young Wild West's friends might have got shot, too."

"Most likely some of 'em did. Ther boys was desperate, I know. But it ain't likely that any more got away. I've sorter got it in my head that I'm ther only one left. If I am, an' I git away from here all right, I'll thank my stars, an' don't yer forgit it!"

"You will get away all right. All I want you to do is to stick to me and do as I tell you."

By this time they were outside of the cave by the way the rascally ranchman had come when he brought his wife.

There was no one in sight, so turning to the left, led the

horses to an opening in the rocks that was barely large enough for them to get through.

Just as they did get into a narrow cave they heard voices coming from the cave they had left.

"They are comin'!" cried the cattle-thief, in dismay.

Robinson's wife gave utterance to a scream.

The villain placed his hand over her mouth and told her to be silent.

But it was too late now.

Young Wild West and his companions were close enough to hear the scream, and a moment later they were at the opening.

Cheyenne Charlie sprang in and sent Robinson to the ground with a blow from the butt of his revolver.

"Whoopee! whoopee! Wow! wow! wow!" he yelled. "We have got 'em dead ter rights now, Wild."

The villainous ranchman was dazed by the blow he had received, and he lay quite still for a moment.

"Make them prisoners, boys, but don't harm the woman," said Wild.

But Robinson recovered himself sufficiently to put up a fight.

"You'll never take me alive, Young Wild West," he screamed, his eyes flashing fire. "You'll——"

That was as far as he got, for Wild's left hand gripped him about the throat and choked the words that were upon his lips.

Back went Robinson, his head striking heavily against a rock, and then, in a dazed state he was forced to the ground.

Jim stood holding the other man by the collar of his shirt, a revolver pressed against the side of his head.

"Just tie this fellow, Charlie," said the young deadshot, in his cool and easy way.

The scout gave a nod, and having the necessary means at hand, he quickly did as he was told, at the same time relieving Robinson of his weapons.

Then the other prisoner was treated in a like manner, after which Wild turned his attention to the fainting woman.

"Just help me carry her out, Jim. Charlie will take care of the prisoners," the boy said.

Jim assisted him, and the unconscious woman who had stuck so faithfully to her villainous husband was borne outside into the open air.

Arietta and Nell Jamieson at once came to her assistance, and in a little while they had restored her to consciousness.

While they were resting there, undecided just what to do with the two prisoners, the sounds made by galloping horses were heard and a few seconds later the cowboy who had been dispatched for help came into view, followed by half a dozen men.

It happened that one of the riders was a deputy sheriff, and when Wild learned this he gave a nod of satisfaction.

"You're just about the man we want to see," he declared. "The cattle thieves have all been cleaned out but these two right here."

"Why, it's Robinson!" declared the deputy, looking astonished.

"Yes, that's right. Jamieson will tell you all about it, I reckon."

Jamieson was glad to do this, and when he had told the complete story the newcomers broke into a cheer.

"Well, I reckon that will be about all, as far as we are concerned," said Wild, as he nodded to the strangers.

Then he turned to the ranchman and cowboys and added:

"We have had a pretty lively time since last night when we met you, boys, but I am glad we have been able to not only find your cattle for you, but to run down the gang of thieves. You will find the cattle that were stolen from you in the cave over at Robinson's ranch. I hardly think it necessary for us to have anything to do with making the necessary charges against Robinson and the man who escaped death with him. You can attend to that all right, Mr. Jamieson."

"I reckon I kin, Wild," the ranchman answered, shaking his head and smiling. "It's almost too good to be true. But I was mighty sartin all along that Robinson knowed all about what was goin' on, an' that he was helpin' Mike Jager in his thievin' work."

"Well, nobody will ever help that galoot ag'in, 'cause he went down about ther first one when ther shootin' begun at ther top of ther cliff," Cheyenne Charlie spoke up. "He was a mighty bad one, I reckon, so he got jest what was comin' to him."

For Dry Corn for corn meal

"It would have been a good thing if ther other two had got ther same dose. Then we wouldn't have had ter bother about puttin' 'em in jail," the deputy sheriff observed, grimly. "I believe in law an' order an' all that kind of thing, but when it comes to cattle thieves, they oughter be lynched."

"You dare not lynch us!" cried Robinson, his face turning the color of ashes. "We must have a fair trial."

"Oh, you'll git a fair trial all right," was the reply. "Don't git scared, Robinson. You have been a very clever galoot, but you have been found out now an' I reckon you'll be put where you'll be kept good for a while. I feel mighty sorry for your wife, though, for she sartinly has stuck to yer."

There was really no one there who did not feel sorry for her.

The poor woman sat upon a rock, trembling like a leaf, her head down and her eyes fixed upon the ground.

Wild sent for Arietta and Nell Jamieson, and when they appeared they did their best to comfort her.

They finally induced her to walk back through the cave and out on the trail with them.

All hands gathered there and then a search around was made, as they might be certain that none of the cattle thieves had escaped.

Robinson was sullen and morose now.

It was decided that Jamieson and two of his men would be enough to go with the party to make the necessary charges against the two villains, and when they were ready to set out for the town, Wild stepped over to the tricky ranchman and said:

"Well, Robinson, is there anything you would like to say before you go?"

"Nothin' more than I hope to live long enough to kill you, Young Wild West!" was the retort.

"Well, I hope you don't, then. But what I meant was that if you wanted to say anything to your wife before you go to jail it would be a good time to do it right now."

The villain's face changed instantly.

A tender look came into his eyes as he turned them upon the woman who had stuck to him so faithfully, even though she knew he was a thief.

"I'll say this much, Young Wild West," he remarked, in a voice that was anything but steady. "There never was a better woman living than that one right there. I want her to be taken care of and I hope she will get over this and live until I serve my sentence. I am fully resigned to my fate, but I am not so old that I haven't hopes of being free again some time. I may be an honest man when that happens, but I suppose I'll always hold the grudge I have against you. You are the cause of all my misfortune, and the poor woman there has you to blame for it."

"I can't help that, Robinson," our hero answered, shaking his head. "You have been playing a great game since you started in to stealing cattle, and you know what you should expect for it. It is too bad that so many lives have been lost to-day. You are responsible for all that, you know. The men working for you were, for the most part, ignorant fellows, and it was your shrewdness and clever ways that urged them on to commit the crimes they were guilty of. This man with you here is not so much to blame for what he has done as you are. You had a way about you that could have been used for good instead of bad. You could have made honest men out of the most of the gang you had in your employ."

"I don't think he could have done it with three of 'em, Wild," Cheyenne Charlie spoke up. "I mean Jager, Black Pete an' Locke."

Robinson was deeply affected, and when he finally kissed his wife and nodded to Wild, Arietta came and led the woman away.

Then those who were to take the prisoners to the settlement

were not long in getting them on the backs of a couple of horses.

They set out at a canter, and when they had disappeared around a bend, Wild called for the rest to strike out for the ranch.

"I will go to my home," Mrs. Robinson said, trying to be more cheerful than she felt. "It is very hard for me to bear, but I feel that I must live under it. I have a brother and sister in the East, and I mean to try and induce one or both of them to come out and live with me."

"A good idea," our hero answered. "I wish you nothing but good luck."

They all rode over to Robinson's ranch.

The woman entered the house, and then the work of getting Jamieson's cattle together was begun.

Wild and his partners assisted, and then they went back to the ranch.

It had been quite a lively time while it lasted, and all hands felt that they had experienced enough excitement for a day or two at least.

It was a pleasant rest they had at the ranch for the next two days, and when it was over Wild and his traveling companions set out to try and find something new.

We might as well state right here that the two prisoners were convicted and sent to prison, and that Robinson's wife was joined on the ranch by a brother, so that she had a chance to live in peace, in the hope that some day her husband would get out of prison and join her.

"Well, probably not. But he could have let them go their own way and not encouraged them in their villainy, if he had chosen to do so."

"Oh, of course!"

"But he didn't do it, so this is the result."

Jamieson now stepped up to the captive ranchman.

"Come, Robinson," he said. "I reckon we'll go now. I am sorry you have been such a neighbor, but not sorry enough to let up on you. I've lost a good many cattle through you, and I can't help feeling sore about it. I am sorry about your wife, though. But if she is willing she can live with us awhile. I know my wife will be glad to take her in. If she don't want to do that she can go back to your ranch. Maybe she could run things well enough to make a good livin', if she hired honest men."

"If she tries to do that, will you help her?" Robinson asked, eagerly.

"Yes, I'll do all in my power to help her along."

"Can I speak to her alone for a minute or two?"

"I don't know why you cant. But ask Young Wild West. I reckon he's bossin' this job."

"Are you willing to allow me to speak in private to my wife before I go?" Robinson asked, looking at our hero.

"Certainly," was the reply. "I'll fetch her over to you, and then we will all walk off a little way. I have no fear that she will try to release you so you will have a chance to escape."

The dejected woman brightened up somewhat when Wild went to her and told her to come over and sit by her husband for a few minutes.

She gladly accepted his escort, and when they were together Wild called for all hands to step aside.

This they did, though the cowboys kept a pretty good watch on the villainous ranchman.

The two were together fully five minutes, during which time the woman cried and laughed by turns.

Next week's issue will contain "YOUNG WILD WEST SAVING THE MAIL-COACH; OR, THE BOSS OF THE MOUNTAIN."

CURRENT NEWS

New York City is to have an office building with a base of 250 feet and a tower running to 1,250 feet above the base. The building will have five stories below the sidewalk and a grand total of 105 stories and 3,500 offices.

The New York grand jury recently found an indictment for burglary against Charles Carrara, arrested through finger-print identification. This is the third time a prisoner has been indicted on this kind of evidence.

The government of Peru has recently placed an order of seven submarine boats for her navy with an American ship building concern. In placing her order in the United States, Peru has followed the lead of Argentina, which now has two of the world's greatest battleships in course of construction in American yards.

A cantaloupe train believed to be the longest the world has ever seen passed through Tucson, Ariz., recently from the Imperial Valley. The train consisted of 130 cars, was a mile and a half in length and contained more than one million pounds of cantaloupes.

Bulldog flies are now killing big game along the international boundary, according to County Commissioner Helic Clementson of Minnesota. Two moose were killed near a lumber camp on the east fork of Rapid River, and in his opinion large numbers of fine animals have lost their lives.

Plunging overboard to the rescue of a companion whom he believed to be in danger, John Blomquist, a dredgeman working in the Galveston channel, was pulled down recently by what is believed to have been a monster shark and drowned in the sight of companions who had set out in a boat to his rescue.

Z. T. Ing, a Chinese student of Wooster University, Ohio, won the English oratorical contest for delegates to the conference last month after a close and exciting contest. C. Chiu, of Georgia University, was second. Mr. Ing took for his subject "A Plea of China for Justice." Mr. Chiu's oration was "The Destiny of China."

With a pair of crutches floating beside it, the body of an elderly man, who had a disabled left leg, was found floating in the slip at Pier 28, East River, New York, by Patrick Bree, the pier watchman, the other day. The body had been in the water probably six hours. It is believed that the man held on to the crutches when he was drowned and that they were released when the body came to the surface of the water.

Hugh K. Robinson, the aviator, has just been nominated by the Trans-Mississippi River Flight Association to make the Minneapolis-to-New Orleans hydro-aeroplane flight of 1,917 miles. Robinson started from the surface of Lake Calhoun, at Minneapolis, this month. He flew for a purse of \$20,000 raised by the river cities in which he is to give hydro-aeroplaning exhibitions.

William N. Vanderweyde, a photographer of Manhattan, New York, had a narrow escape from drowning in Flushing Bay, last month. He was engaged in trying to get views of yachts and had his head under a cloth when the swell from a passing motorboat struck his launch and threw him overboard. The focusing cloth entangled itself about his head, and his companions had great difficulty in rescuing him.

Under the will of Ernest Finis, just filed for probate in New Haven, Conn., Henry George Finis, a young son, must wait until he is fifty years of age before receiving any portion of the \$14,000 left him by his father. The testament directs that the property be held in trust for him until he reaches this age. No reason for the unusual provision is given. It does not apply to similar bequests to four other children.

M. Mamet, the aviator, formerly associated with M. Bleriot, intends touring the world in an aeroplane with a companion, Rene Million. The route so far planned runs southward through France, Spain, Algeria, Tunis and Egypt, thence by steamer to India, across India through the air, by steamer to Australia, by steamer to South America, a flight over that country, thence by steamer to Africa and then northward by the air line.

The dreadnought Courbet was launched at Lorient, France, recently. She is the second of the six battleships projected in 1910 to take the water, the Jean Bart having been launched already. The Courbet has a displacement of about 23,000 tons. Her armament will be similar to that of the Jean Bart, consisting of twelve 12-inch guns and twenty-four 6-inch guns. She will cost \$12,490,000.

Walter Scott, the "Death Valley Mystery," again is spending money with a lavish hand at Barstow, the place of his first ex-

perience in that line. Scott came to Barstow to visit his brother, "Bill" Scott, and is apparently well supplied with bank bills and gold again, though where he got them is as much a mystery as it was before. Since arriving at the little desert town he has managed to keep himself in the limelight much of the time, flashing his money whenever occasion permitted.

A water-carrying motor car, probably the first of its kind in the world, has just been placed in commission in Philadelphia by the Women's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as a dispenser of water to thirsty horses. The car, its mission clearly placarded on its body, will move slowly through busy streets in the parts of Philadelphia where troughs are not available, and any driver can stop it and get a bucket of water free of charge.

The outlook for football at the Carlisle Indian School this season is very encouraging. The squad, which has worked now for a fortnight, comprises nearly forty young braves, with a few old men returning daily from outing work. Coach Warner, in commenting on the season's style of play, laconically indicated "shifts" as the probable trend of minor football strategy. Warner has somewhat modified his ideas on the training table for gridiron athletes and his fattening process may not be carried to the extreme ordinarily sought.

Pat Conway, president of the Irish-American A. C., has granted permission to the Public Schools Athletic league to have boys in that organization hold their coming cross-country runs at Celtic park. They are scheduled to take place a week after the senior Meets. Mr. Conway is deeply interested in schoolboys, and has often gone out of his way to make things easier for them. When some of the officials of the league asked him if they could have the I. A. A. C.'s grounds upon which their boys could hold the cross-country runs, he gladly acquiesced.

Talking about schoolboys, it is appropriate at this time to mention young Harold Tannebaum, of P. S. 10, Manhattan, who is showing his strides in great form. In Syracuse, he was practically the whole thing on the New York relay team, which captured first prize in the half-mile inter-city race. To top off his great running in the relay, he won the sixty-yard dash in 64-5 seconds, tying the P. S. A. L. record. Tannebaum is the making of a future star. He is an aggressive sort of a chap, always on the go, and is a sprinter of no mean ability.

The Brown varsity football squad, at Providence, R. I., twenty-six strong, had its practice work under the direction of Superintendent Marvel and Coaches Pryor and Gammons. While a number of good men have left the line and backfield, Captain Sprackling, the brilliant quarterback, is assured of having a sufficient nucleus of last year's aggressive combination to make a creditable showing against the best of the big teams. Sprackling expects to repeat the overwhelming victory scored over the sons of Eli on Yale field last year.

Cows are not numerous in Japan, but the Japanese are fond of milk, and to meet this demand in the face of a natural shortage they have recently put their wits to work and evolved a product that the average person cannot distinguish from the regular dairy article. The artificial milk is derived from the soja bean. The beans are first soaked, then boiled in water. Presently the liquid turns white, sugar and phosphate of potash in proper quantities are added and the boiling continued until a substance the thickness of molasses is obtained. This fluid corresponds very accurately with ordinary condensed milk and when water is added cannot be told from fresh.

One of the latest and most notable innovations in the mechanical world is a new apparatus which has rendered possible a new method of cookery for the great travelling circuses and other road shows. These tented exhibitions serve three meals a day to their performers and other employees—in some instances aggregating 1,200 men and women—in special dining tents on the exhibition "lot." Under the conditions prevailing until this year all meats, soups and other food were cooked over camp fires in great open pots. The most important feature of the new equipment is a steam cooker, which resembles a fire engine in appearance and is operated on somewhat the same principle.

There is now a movement on foot to bring seals into fashion once more—those pretty baubles in onyx or other precious stones, on which an image or a device is engraved, and with which our parents and grandparents closed their letters. The promoters of this movement belong to the literary world, and they are anxious to introduce into our prosaic, matter-of-fact existence some of the poetry of bygone ages. The aristocracy love their crests and their mottoes, an example followed by some members of the middle classes. Last month a note carved on wood in the Finnish tongue and tied to a hoisting cable in the Morning Star mine, brought information to the surface that three Finnish miners were entombed 350 feet below by a cave-in.

THE BOY TEAMSTER

OR,

THE YOUNG HERO OF THE GREAT FLOOD

By PAUL BRADDON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY TEAMSTER AND SID BLAKSLEY.

In the valley of the Ohio, between the Little Kanawha and the larger stream of the same name, there is a flourishing village which will be known in our narrative as Pleasantville.

The site of the town, which contains a population of about four thousand souls, is a pleasant one, and thus it seems the name we have, for obvious reasons, since this story is a true one, chosen for the place is really quite appropriate.

The Ohio river flows by Pleasantville almost in sight of the principal portion of the village, and possibly a mile south of the town a large, swift stream empties into the great river.

The surrounding country is fertile, and valuable farms abound all along the river bottom, but the land is low and subject to inundation in case the Ohio overflows its banks.

Here and there, scattered over the pleasing landscape irregularly, and serving to break its monotony, small tracts of timber had been left standing by the provident farmers, that they may have material convenient for future use.

Into one of these timber tracts, situated about one mile from the village of Pleasantville, we conduct the reader one day in the early spring of the year of the last great floods on the Ohio.

The ice fetters of winter's bondage have scarcely been well cast aside as yet, and the streams and the great river is not free from ice. In the timber, screened from the melting sunlight, some snow yet remains, but elsewhere it has disappeared.

Heavy spring rains have set in early this year, and already the broad Ohio is very high and turbulent and filled with drift ice, while every brook and streamlet has been transformed into turbulent, swift flowing torrents, flowing on to swell the already brimming river.

A feeling of insecurity prevails throughout the Ohio valley, and danger is anticipated. Old settlers shake their heads ominously and each new day anxious eyes look out upon the rising river, and all the time the peril of a great flood is increasing.

But a bright-faced, sturdy, well-grown boy of eighteen, who is traversing the timber tract to which we have alluded, gun in hand, about mid-day, is not thinking of flood or peril.

The youth's mind is occupied with ambitious thoughts and hopes of coming success, for he is a student of the Pleasantville academy, and the winter term has closed, and

that very afternoon the final exercises of the school are to be held.

The principal of the academy has offered a gold medal as a prize to be awarded to the lad who delivers the best original oration that afternoon, and Paul Manville is confident of making a good effort for the honor and the award.

Paul lives in the village and he is a poor boy. His mother is dead and he lives with his step-father in a small cottage owned by his mother when she was taken away.

The boy's step-father is named Silas Snedeker, and he has never evinced much love for Paul or shown solicitude for his welfare.

In the village Silas Snedeker does not bear a good name, and he is known to be "shiftless" and somewhat given to drink. Since the death of Paul's mother, Snedeker has not followed any regular occupation, and Paul's earnings have supported him mainly.

The lad has been employed by a mill owner as a teamster for three years, and he is a splendid driver and natural horseman. He is well known throughout the neighborhood, and he is often alluded to as "The Boy Teamster."

Paul drives the mill team all summer, but for three or four months each winter he attends school, as his employer has consented that he may do so, cold weather and ice in the stream causing the mill, which is merely a country gristmill, to shut down during midwinter.

But though he only attended the academy in the winter, Paul studied faithfully all summer after working hours.

Paul Manville was a general favorite, for he was honest, manly and good-tempered. At the academy, among all the students engaged, in general, in friendly rivalry for distinction, Paul had but one single enemy, and he was a most malicious one. But more of this anon.

Mr. Snedeker's sow had strayed away into the woods that day, and Paul's step-father sent the lad to look for it. Having failed to find the stray animal, Paul was now on his way home, and anxious to get there as soon as possible, for, as the prize contest at the academy commenced at one o'clock and the delivery of the competing orations was the first thing on the programme, he knew he would have but little time to spare if he arrived at the academy in time.

Paul had taken his gun with him, thinking he might get a shot at a squirrel or two, but it had begun to rain soon after he had entered the woods and he had not seen any game whatever.

Walking swiftly, the lad came to a shinglemaker's abandoned cabin not far from the edge of the timber, and as

it now began to rain in torrents, he dodged inside the shelter for a moment to arrange his clothing the better to withstand the drenching.

The cabin was a small, one-story structure without a single window, but the door was a heavy one of hewn plank, and the roof shed the rain.

Just as Paul dodged into the cabin a youth about his own age, very nicely dressed, though somewhat foppishly, came out of the bushes near by.

"That was Paul Manville, sure enough, confound him. If it wasn't for him I should feel sure of winning the prize at the academy for the best oration to-day. I'm not afraid of any of the other fellows beating me," muttered the well-dressed boy, whose name was Sid Blaksley.

He glanced searchingly about for a moment and then suddenly his dark face lighted up with an exultant and malicious expression.

Gliding forward quickly he reached the door of the cabin without making the slightest sound, and softly closed the door and secured it by means of a short log which stood against the sill, bracing the log against the door.

Paul had his boots off, and he was pouring the water out of them inside the cabin when he was suddenly left in darkness by the closing of the door. He hastily jerked on his boots and sprang forward, but his momentary delay gave Sid Blaksley time to secure the door.

"Who are you who has closed the door? What do you mean by shutting me up in here? Let me out, I say!" cried Paul, throwing himself against the door and striving to force it open.

A taunting laugh was returned by Sid Blaksley.

"Get out the best way you can, Paul Manville. I mean to keep you where you are so you can't appear at the academy to compete for the prize to-day. With you absent I shall be sure to win. I told you I'd get even with you the day you knocked me down and humiliated me in the presence of Ray Worrel; though why she should prefer a boy who has to drive a team for a living to a young gentleman like myself I don't understand," he said.

"For shame, Sid Blaksley; you are a mean, cowardly fellow to take advantage of me in this way. You know how hard I have worked for the prize. It's a fair contest for all. Come, let me out," replied Paul.

"After the exercises are over and I've won the prize I may send some one to let you out, for I don't want you to starve here. Now I'm off. Just imagine me the winner of the prize. I think I've got even with you, Paul Manville," retorted Sid Blaksley, sneeringly.

Then he hastened away.

Poor Paul, in anger and disappointment, was almost ready to shed bitter tears. He battered upon the door and shouted for help until he was tired. Still no one came to liberate him, and he finally sat down in the dark and yielded to his feelings—gave way to despair.

But all at once he heard the sound of footsteps, and presently the sound of voices reached his ears at the cabin door. He was about to leap up with a glad cry, when he was arrested by what he heard.

Two men were at the door. Their voices were strange, but Paul heard one of them say:

"Come into the cabin out of the rain while I git the kit

of tools I hid there. I've got everything ready for the job, and we'll lift the old man's money without much trouble."

Instantly it flashed across Paul's mind that the men at the door were robbers and that they must not see him. There was a heap of wood and shavings in one corner, and behind this Paul concealed himself just as the men without pushed away the log and opened the door.

The two men entered the cabin, and the foremost one came straight toward Paul's hiding-place, saying:

"I hid the bag of tools under the shavings behind the wood here in the corner."

Paul's heart gave a great leap, for he knew he must now be discovered, and the light from the open door showed him that the two strange men were ugly, desperate looking fellows such as no one would care to encounter under the circumstances.

The lad measured the distance to the door with his eyes and then made a leap, and darted out of the cabin.

The two men were for the instant so completely surprised that they stood motionless. But they rushed to the door a moment after Paul sprang through it.

"Stop, you young rascal! Stop, I say!" shouted one of the strangers, and he started in pursuit of Paul.

The boy ran like a deer, making for the road leading to the village at the end of the woods.

CHAPTER II.

RAY WORREL'S GUARDIAN IS INTRODUCED.

Paul quickly gained the highway beyond the woods, and the strange men did not pursue him far.

The lad reached the village safely, but he did not go home, for he knew there was still a chance of his reaching the academy in time for the prize contest if he made no further delay. So, just as he was, without even changing his wet clothing, Paul ran for the academy.

The school in question was an excellent one, and not only did the youth of the town attend it, but many students came from a distance and boarded in the village while they became pupils of the institution.

Among these latter was Sid Blaksley. He was an orphan like our young hero, Paul Manville, but he was the heir of a considerable fortune, which he would receive when he became of age.

Sid Blaksley's home was in H——, a large town further north, and there he resided with his guardian, one Kirk Sanford, a petty lawyer, when not at school.

Sid Blaksley was the best dressed boy in the school, and he always had plenty of money. He boasted of his wealth, and declared that his guardian denied him nothing.

Young Blaksley was used to having his own way, and he was a proud and overbearing lad. Not over polite to any one, he was always inclined to treat his inferiors, or those whom he considered as such, with positive rudeness.

Of course, he was not a favorite on this account, and moreover, as he had an evil, quarrelsome disposition, and was vindictive and revengeful, he made enemies where he

might, at no cost save gentlemanly demeanor, have acquired friends.

A spirit of rivalry had existed between Paul Manville and young Blaksley for a considerable time, and this rivalry was not confined to school matters, in which Blaksley aspired to be a leader. There was another cause of dislike between the two boys to which we have heard Blaksley allude.

Pretty Ray Worrel, the daughter of a poor widow of the village, was admired by both the boys, and the young miss had evinced a decided preference for Paul, much to the chagrin of Blaksley.

On one occasion, when the young teamster was in Ray's company, Blaksley had persisted in forcing his attentions upon the little lady in such an annoying and insulting manner that Paul had been compelled to knock the young rascal down in order to protect Ray.

It was to this incident that Sid alluded at the cabin in the woods when he taunted Paul after making him a prisoner.

From that day Sid Blaksley had openly showed his enmity for Paul, and he had threatened more than once that he would be even with him. And Blaksley had by no means relinquished the hope of setting Paul aside in Miss Ray's favor.

But to follow Paul.

The lad arrived at the academy almost exhausted by swift running, and meeting one of the students at the door, he asked, breathlessly:

"Is the speaking contest over yet?"

"No, but it has commenced. Some of the boys, including Sid Blaksley, have spoken, but your name has not been called yet. What made you so late? And you haven't got on your good clothes. Well, well!" replied the boy.

"I haven't time to talk now, but I'll tell you all about it some time," said Paul, and he hastened into the academy.

There was a large audience present, including a number of persons from a distance, who were the friends of the non-resident students.

Paul glanced about eagerly, hoping to see his girlish sweetheart, Ray Worrel, but she was not present, and Paul thought:

"It must be that Ray's mother is very much worse, so that her daughter cannot leave her."

Mrs. Worrel had been ill for some time, and the physician had a few days before expressed grave doubts of her recovery.

As he glanced about the crowded hall, Paul saw Sid Blaksley seated beside a portly, over-dressed man, who was a stranger.

Sid Blaksley's looks told that he was surprised, disappointed and a trifle alarmed at Paul's arrival.

We need not dwell upon the exercises that ensued at the academy.

Suffice it to say that Paul Manville's ambitious hopes were realized, and he won the prize for the best oration.

Just after the audience dispersed Paul met Sid Blaksley alone in the vestibule.

Blaksley's jealous rage at Paul's success found vent in an insulting accusation.

"You never wrote the oration you delivered as original. You stole it from some book, and I know it!" he hissed.

Paul was burning with indignation at the trick Sid Blaksley had put upon him in the woods, and now his anger flamed up and he replied hotly:

"You know you lie, Sid Blaksley!"

Some other words passed, and the succeeding moment Blaksley clinched Paul. But the latter quickly threw the young rascal, and he cried lustily for help. Then the man Paul had seen with Sid in the hall came in through the street door.

This man was Kirk Sanford, Sid's guardian, who had come to Pleasantville to visit his ward.

"Take him off or he'll kill me!" yelled Sid.

Kirk Sanford seized Paul by the collar and tore him from Sid while he continued to whine.

Sanford carried a cane, and while his red face became redder than ever, he began to belabor Paul.

"I'll teach you to assault my ward, you young villain!" cried Kirk Sanford in anger.

But Paul managed to snatch the cane away from Sanford, and at the same time free himself from his hold, and he darted away with the cane. The irate lawyer pursued. The river was just at the end of the academy grounds, and reaching the bank, and seeing that he was about to be overtaken, Paul flung the lawyer's cane far out into the waters of the Ohio, that the latter might not have the means of further chastising him at hand.

"I'll prosecute ye for larceny! That cane was worth ten dollars," roared Sanford, again seizing Paul. "Who's your father? I'll report you to him."

"My step-father is Silas Snedeker," replied Paul.

Kirk Sanford gave a quick start and released the boy.

"Silas Snedeker your step-father, eh!" he muttered, and then without another word he hurried back to Sid, much to Paul's wonderment; but he was glad to get away from the fellow.

Paul went homeward at once, and on the way he came to the Widow Worrel's cottage, and Ray met him at the gate.

In a few words Paul told of his triumph, and Ray duly congratulated him. Then Paul asked about the young miss' mother.

"Mother is much worse. Oh, Paul, the doctor says she cannot live until morning," replied Ray with a burst of tears.

"Poor girl, what will you do without your mother?" asked Paul in tender tones.

"Mother has written to an uncle of mine whom I have never seen, and he is coming to-day. Mother says I am to go and live with him when she is gone."

"I am very sorry for you, Ray," said Paul, and then after some further talk he passed on.

Meanwhile, Kirk Sanford, upon rejoining Sid Blaksley, said:

"Now you can go on home to your boarding-house, Sidney, and presently I will rejoin you there, but just now I've a little business to attend to. Can you tell me how to find the Widow Worrel's house?"

(To be continued)

THE CAMPING-OUT CLUB

OR,

NEW YORK BOYS IN THE WILD WOODS

By COL. RALPH FENTON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER II. (continued)

Old Humbolt then strode on ahead of the wagons as before, but as he went Jack saw that he was muttering to himself, and that he looked troubled. Of course the lad could overhear what the hunter said in self-communion. Had he been able to do so, he would have caught these words:

"I hope the men won't catch poor old Joe Marvin in the raid after the free hunters. The old man is guilty enough, but heaven only knows what would become of his crippled daughter if he was jailed. I haven't the heart to arrest old Joe on lame Jennie's account, though I'd like nothing better than to get Gardeau, the old French villain, and Red Fox, the Injun, in the jail."

Without meeting with any adventure worthy of note, the Camping Out Club arrived at the lumber camp owned by Mr. Bayard, and which, as we have seen, had been named in his honor, Bayardville.

Of course, Jack Dudley and his young comrades received a warm welcome from the lumber king and his pretty daughter, and you may be sure the latter and her boyish sweetheart soon found an opportunity to be alone together. They had not met for some months, and so their reunion was all the more joyful, and they mutually renewed their vows of affection and devotion.

Old Humbolt, the guide and hunter, was well known at the lumber camp, and every one seemed to respect the veteran of the woods.

Then, too, as a chief game warden, he had new claims for consideration, for he represented the State authorities.

Possibly no one else noticed it, but Old Humbolt was conscious of the fact that there was one man at the lumber camp who treated him coolly, and betrayed in his manner that he secretly harbored some ill feeling against him.

The man alluded to was Latour Barbole, the little, dark-faced, fierce-eyed French-Canadian, who served Mr. Bayard as a clerk.

As Old Humbolt had never antagonized Barbole in any way, and, in fact, had never had anything whatever to do with the undersized clerk, he was at first wholly at loss to divine why Barbole regarded him with so much evident aversion.

But presently he recalled to mind a fact which had transiently escaped his recollection.

"Ah, I remember now! Latour Barbole is the nephew of old Gardeau, the notorious free hunter and desperado. The clerk sympathizes with his uncle, and hates me because

he knows as chief of game wardens it is my duty to arrest Gardeau," Old Humbolt reflected.

That afternoon, as Lucy Bayard and Jack Dudley were out walking, they passed the office at the mill, and both saw a dark-faced man looking at them through the window.

The young girl at once recognized Barbole, of course, but as Jack had not met the clerk, he had no knowledge of his identity.

But the youth was positively startled by the expression of the swarthy face at the window. He saw the man's features were distorted by a look of malignant hatred, and that his fiercely-scintillating eyes were fixed upon himself.

"Who is that man? He looked as if in me he recognized a mortal enemy, and yet I know I never saw him before," said Jack, in surprised tones, when he and Lucy had passed the window.

"He is one of father's clerks, Latour Barbole by name. Don't mind him. I fancy he has been foolish enough to take kind treatment on my part for something more," answered Lucy with a conscious blush.

"Oh, then jealousy is at the bottom of his evidently savage feeling toward me. I didn't expect to find an enemy here among strangers, but if that man's face told the truth he is my bitter foe," said Jack.

His tones told that he regretted the circumstance, but there was no trace of fear or apprehension in his voice or manner.

Lucy sought with apparent success to divert his mind from all thoughts of Barbole, and they strolled back to the Bayard cabin.

The boys of the Camping Out Club had set up their large, comfortable tent near the home of the lumber king. The wagons were drawn up beside it, and the horses were tethered under the trees near by.

The members of the club were reclining on the grass before the tent, and Old Humbolt was seated on a log near by, when Jack and Lucy came up on their way to the young girl's home.

Just as the couple arrived at the camp the sounds of excited voices were heard, and a number of men were seen hastily approaching from the direction of the mills and the lake road.

Old Humbolt started up instantly, and as he looked at the approaching men, he exclaimed:

"Ha! Ballard and Lambert with other game wardens, an' by powder, they've got Old Gardeau, Red Fox, the Injun, an' poor old Joe Marvin!"

The party soon came up, and Jack and all present saw

that old Gardeau was a desperate and villainous looking French-Canadian of powerful frame, clad in wild woods costume.

Red Fox, the Indian, was a savage-looking Winnebago, and he seemed to be a fitting companion for the white free hunter, Gardeau, but the third prisoner—Joe Marvin—was a man of entirely different appearance.

CHAPTER III.

A FOE IN THE DARKNESS.

Marvin was a man probably fifty odd years of age, and in his face there was nothing evil. On the contrary, he possessed a mild, rather pleasant countenance. But the irresolute mouth and retreating chin seemed to indicate but little strength of character.

Indeed, Joe Marvin was a weak character, hopelessly ignorant and shiftless, but not naturally evilly disposed. He dwelt in a lonely cabin in the woods, at some distance from the lumber camp, with his motherless daughter Jennie, who had been pitifully lame from her infancy.

The old woodsman was devoted to his crippled daughter, and the lumbermen and the hunters knew it. Old Joe was generally regarded as harmless, but it was well known that he disregarded the game laws at times, though he always declared he never killed a deer out of season, except when necessity drove him to it, to secure food.

The arrival of the game wardens with their prisoners occasioned a good deal of excitement in the lumber camp.

The wardens had passed the mills with their prisoners, and the men there employed had followed the party, so when the wardens halted at the camp of the city boys, quite a crowd gathered about.

"We said we'd git old Gardeau an' the Injun, an' we've done it. But we didn't count on meetin' Marvin. We found him at Gardeau's camp, and so we took him in with the others," said Warden Ballard, as the prisoners were brought before Old Humbolt.

"Sacre! You are ze cur, ze cowards! You make like ze snake to creep up and give me no chance. Bah! Red Fox an' me we could ze whole of you make to go fast—to run—if you come to our face bold, what you call like ze man zat is brave!" said Gardeau, insolently.

"Wah! Red Fox was asleep when the men came to the Frenchman's lodge. Moose Killer, you big chief of game men now, you put Red Fox in jail some day he kill you!" gritted the Indian, in fierce, guttural tones, while his black eyes flashed dangerously and he glared at Humbolt.

Before the latter could make any reply, Joe Marvin spoke up.

"Ole Humbolt, I know yer chief o' game wardens now, an' I ain't got nothin' to say ag'in yu fer that. I s'pose if you kin prove I killed game outen season, I've got ter go up. But what I want is jest a leetle time to fix things at my cabin, so my poor little lame gal 'ull have enough to eat while I'm gone. Nobody kin say old Joe are a liar, an' if you'll let me off fer a week, I sw'ar I'll come in yere an' surrender to ye when my time is up," Marvin said.

The last words of the speaker, whose voice trembled with emotion, and of whose sincerity and simple honesty of purpose none who heard him could doubt, called forth a murmur of sympathy from the lumbermen.

But Gardeau laughed sneeringly, and Red Fox, the Indian, exclaimed disdainfully:

"Marvin is a squaw, an old woman. Bah!"

"I'd like ter let ye go to lay in a supply o' game an' povender fer yer lame gal, Marvin, but I can't do it, fer it's ag'in the law, an' if I stretched a p'int fer you, Gardeau and the Injun would claim the same privilege. No, I'm mighty sorry, but you have got to go to jail with the others. But your daughter shall be cared for, that I promise you," answered Humbolt.

Gardeau and the Indian both had their hands bound behind their backs by means of stout cords. Thus they had been secured by the game wardens at the time of their capture.

Marvin was bound in a similar manner.

But, unknown to the wardens, of course, Red Fox, the wily Indian, had managed to loosen the cords upon his wrists, so that he could free his hands at any moment.

On the way to the lumber camp, the game wardens and their prisoners had marched in Indian file for some distance along a narrow path, which ran through a dense wood where the underbrush at each side of the pathway was well nigh impenetrable.

While the party was traversing the pathway alluded to, Red Fox had marched next to Gardeau in the rear, and men of the warden's force preceded and marched behind the two prisoners.

Undetected, Red Fox had slipped his hands free for a moment or so while the party was marchinng along the narrow woods' path, and he had succeeded in loosening the cords on Gardeau's wrists, so that the Frenchman, too, could free his hands at will.

But the game wardens held their rifles ready for instant use all the time during the march to the lumber camp. Never for a moment was their vigilance relaxed, and so neither Gardeau nor the Indian had ventured to make a dash to escape.

Ballard, the game warden in charge of the force of the free hunters' captors, had told them his men would not hesitate to shoot them down if they attempted to escape.

Now that the lumber camp was reached, and the prisoners were surrounded, the game wardens seemed to consider that their prisoners were secure, and while the conversation we have recorded was taking place before the tent of the Camping Out Club, Red Fox was planning a desperate break for liberty.

While Joe Marvin was speaking to Old Humbolt, the Indian whispered to Gardeau and said:

"Follow Red Fox. Um make dash into crowd of mill men who got no guns with um. Me snatch gun from guard. You do same. Then no fire at first, else hit mill men. If mill men try stop us we shoot um."

"Yes," answered Gardeau, ready and willing to adopt the desperate plan of the Indian, rather than serve a term of imprisonment.

"We'll make for the hosses under trees, mount an' ride

for woods; may be Red Fox band not far away," continued the Indian.

When Humbolt told Marvin he could not accede to his request to release him, Jack Dudley was standing quite near the prisoners with Lucy.

As the game warden chief spoke, Red Fox suddenly uttered a savage war whoop.

Like a flash his hands came from behind his back free, and snatching a rifle from the hands of one of the game warden's posse, at Jack's side, he leveled the weapon full at Old Humbolt's heart.

For one brief instant the game warden chief stood in the very shadow of instant death.

But as the Indian desperado pressed the trigger of his weapon, Jack Dudley struck up his arm with a powerful blow, and the discharged bullet whizzed into the air, high above the head of the man whom the red rascal meant to slay.

At the same instant that Red Fox possessed himself of the weapon of one of his guards, Gardeau secured a rifle in the same manner, and bounded away among the mill men, who made way for him, for he vowed he would shoot down any one who tried to stop him.

The game wardens could not fire at Gardeau without hitting some of the mill men, so the fugitive reached the horses belonging to the Camping Out Club, and mounting one of them, dashed away for the woods riding bareback.

Meanwhile, when Jack struck up the rifle in the hand of Red Fox just in time to save the life of Old Humbolt, the brave youth leaped upon the enraged and desperate Indian.

His stolen rifle was dashed from his grasp by the lad, when he dealt the blow that spoiled the aim which the redman had taken at Old Humbolt.

While Lucy uttered an alarmed scream, and turned pale with fright on Jack's account, he and Red Fox closed in a desperate struggle.

But it was of short duration. The men of the game warden's force hurled themselves upon the Indian, and while Jack sprang away from him unharmed, the savage was overpowered and again bound.

His delay to attempt to shoot Humbolt had defeated his chance to escape.

Red Fox, when overpowered, glared at Jack, and hissed in his guttural voice, which passion rendered almost unintelligible:

"Me kill white boy for this. Me take um scalp, if have to track um to the big lodges of the pale faces."

A number of the members of the game warden's posse had gone in pursuit of Gardeau, while others were overpowering the Indian.

But after Red Fox and Joe Marvin had been taken to the new jail by the order of Humbolt, and there placed in separate cells, the men who had gone in pursuit of the fleeing free hunter returned and reported that he had eluded them.

Old Humbolt did not mean that Gardeau should long remain at large, and he placed himself at the head of his men and took the trail of the fleeing man on the stolen horse that very night.

That evening Jack Dudley was a guest at the Bayard

cabin, and with Lucy and her father he talked of the exciting events of the day. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Bayard remarked in troubled tones:

"I am very sorry, Jack, that you have made an enemy of Red Fox, for the Indian is a murderous rascal, and should he escape while you are in the north woods, I am sure he would seek to take your life as he declared he would when he was overpowered after his attempt to escape. It was a brave and noble thing for you to attack the rascal as you did. And if you have made the Indian your deadly foe, you have made a valuable friend for life of Old Humbolt. He will never forget how you saved his life when the Indian had taken aim at him, and he'll seek to repay the debt of gratitude he owes you yet."

Lucy, too, expressed her regret that Jack had become involved in the troubles between the free hunters and the game wardens.

It was late when Jack left the hospitable cabin of the lumber magnate to go to the camp of his young comrades nearby.

The night was one of almost impenetrable gloom, and Jack could scarcely see an object three feet distant. As he approached the camp of his friends he suddenly fancied he heard a stealthy footstep behind him. The succeeding moment, as he paused to listen, a human form seemed to start up out of the gloom close beside him, and he was seized by a pair of powerful hands, one of which clutched his throat at the first onset. As he struggled desperately, believing he was fighting for his life, his assailant uttered in a hissing whisper:

"Wah! Now Red Fox keep um word an' kill white boy!"

CHAPTER IV.

HECTOR, THE STRANGE BOY OF THE WOODS.

The heavy hand of Jack Dudley's unseen assailant, which had clutched the lad's throat with a grip of iron, rendered it impossible for him to utter a cry for help, and he experienced the horrible sensation of strangling.

The murderously, threatening words which his invisible enemy hissed in his ear, told him that he had been waylaid by Red Fox, the Winnebago free hunter, and the comrade of the notorious North Woods desperado, Gardeau.

The lad's astonishment at learning the identity of his assailant was exceeded only by the terror with which his situation of terrible peril inspired him, for he had supposed the Winnebago was at that moment secure behind the bars of the rude jail of the lumber camp.

The determined attempt which the lad made to free himself from the tenacious hold of the vindictive Indian was unavailing.

The latter knew well enough that if he allowed the boy to utter a single cry for assistance, his boyish comrades at their nearby camp would be alarmed, and they would come to help his victim.

The Indian had broken out of jail but a short time before he sprang upon Jack in the darkness.

And he was on his way to the woods when he saw the lad leaving the cabin of the lumber king.

(To be continued)

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GOOD CURRENT NEWS ARTICLES

On a sturdy cow pony Miss Alberta Clair is now riding from the Pacific to the Atlantic for a prize of \$1,000. She left Los Angeles after an imposing ceremony. The first stage of her journey is through the desert. She has 110 days in which to finish her journey to New York.

After Miss S. V. Norris, of Philadelphia, had searched for fifteen years for her brother Charles, whom she has not seen for thirty-five years, she learned a few days ago he was in jail at Redlands, Cal., because he refused to pay a fine he thought unjust. She hurried there, only to learn he had left five minutes before for the desert and had completely disappeared.

To show what a good pitcher his fourteen-year-old son Aaron was recently, Abraham Robinson organized a baseball club at Philadelphia and played on it himself. In the third inning of a game Aaron wound up to strike out a player and the ball went wild and hit his father, breaking three ribs. "You have speed," admitted the injured man to his son, "but will have to get better control."

The easiest way to get to San Francisco, according to "Ben" Cobb's theory, is to rise in an aeroplane, remain stationary, let the earth fly beneath you until 'Frisco gets under and then come down. Cobb, a Brooklyn machinist, has just built a flying machine at Caldwell, N. J., and expects to ascend 5,000 feet in it and keep it stationary by a system of suction plungers. He says as the earth turns from west to east he can stay up until the whole world passes under him.

No Gentile, it is said, has ever been inside the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City. That is the reason why a restaurant proprietor of that city, who recently succeeded in obtaining pictures of the forbidden interior, which he now has safe in a bank vault in New York city, hopes to sell them for not less than \$100,000. If the Mormon Church will not buy them, to protect itself, he expects to put them on slides and show them in this city, and, perhaps, have them printed on postal cards.

The next or twelfth annual A.B.C. international tournament will be held in Chicago from March 2 to 24, 1912. They will use twenty-four of the best alleys, pin setters, pins, etc. They expect to have over six hundred five-men teams and over \$40,000 in cash prizes. The International Amphitheater has been secured, with a seating capacity of six thousand, and a large annex that will be used for a palm garden during the tournament. All Chicago bowlers are on the entertainment committee, which will assure you that the visiting bowlers will be well taken care of."

GRINS AND CHUCKLES

"Did the alarm of fire last night wake your baby?" asked one Harlemit. "No," answered the other. "That's strange. Wonder why yours didn't wake up?" "Huh! He wasn't asleep."

Spatts—What has become of Whiffett's typewriter? Did he discharge her? Spudds—No; she quit in a huff. "What for?" "Jealousy." "Jealousy?" "Yes; Whiffett's wife came into the office one day and kissed him, and the typewriter walked straight out."

Justice Walsh—How old are you? Witness (woman)—Thirty. Justice Walsh—Thirty? I have heard you give the same age in this court for the past three years. Witness—Yes; I am not one of those persons who say one thing to-day and another to-morrow.

Robson—Hello, old man! Glad I ran across you. Found a dollar in an old pair of pants this morning, and I've got to celebrate it. Let's go open a bottle of champagne. Dobson—In a minute. I dropped a nickel through this grating a few moments ago, and I've given a boy a quarter to go down and find it.

Warwick—Have you read about that Hindoo juggler that balances himself at the upper end of a perpendicular pole thirty feet high and travels at a pretty fair speed by leaping over the ground, using the pole as one might a single leg? Wickware—I hadn't read of it, but I don't doubt it at all. These bicycle scorches will drive a man to almost anything.

A little Boston girl, about four or five years old, was enjoying a slide on the sidewalk when her heels flew up and she fell with great force upon the stones. A lady picked her up and asked kindly: "You poor little mite, how did you fall?" The tiny child looked up into her kind friend's face, and, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, sobbed: "Vertically, ma'am."

We have had the feature story of this magazine set up in smaller type. It is now longer than it ever was before. It formerly contained about 27,500 words. It now contains 32,800 words. By reducing the size of the type we now give our readers one-third more reading matter than they ever got before for 5 cents, without shortening the main story except in appearance.

THE BROTHERS

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

Howard and Robert Van Dam were twin brothers, and as nearly alike in appearance as they could be without being the same.

Robert's hair was lighter than Howard's, and was more wavy; then, too, he had little or no beard, while his brother had considerable.

They were both equal in muscular development, and were about evenly matched in strength and agility, both being handsome, brawny fellows, who carried away all the prizes for athletic sports, dividing them equally.

There were other things in which the brothers competed for honors besides athletic sports, and in which they were not so equally successful.

One of these was the hand of a young lady named Marian Duval, both brothers having fallen in love with her, and both striving to win her.

She treated both with equal courtesy before strangers, though she really inclined towards Robert, much to Howard's disgust, for he wanted her for himself.

In this affair the rivalry was not as friendly as it was in other things, each thinking that the other ought to draw out of the contest.

Neither would, however, and Marian herself, with a woman's vanity, kept them both up to the highest pitch of excitement, finding pleasure in having their attentions.

She was not a coquette by any means, but loved to be courted and admired, and thought she had time enough yet to choose between the two brothers.

She did not think that by dallying too long she might, perhaps, lose both.

Marian's father was a harsh sort of man, having an ugly temper, and being apt to fly out at his best friend upon the slightest provocation, or without any at all.

"Robert put up with his idiosyncrasies on Marion's account, and managed to get along very well with him, but Howard could not endure his unmannerly ways, and frequently made very tart replies to the gruff fellow's coarse remarks.

One evening Howard returned from a hunt, and, having some very fine partridges, thought he would make Marian a present.

Still clad in his rough hunting-jacket and leggings, he entered the house without knocking, as he always did, and proceeded to the sitting-room, where he found Marian and Robert.

"I have brought you a present," he said, "of some fat partridges."

"Oh, father will be delighted," said Marian. "He dotes on partridges."

"And aren't you delighted also?" asked Howard, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"Not particularly," she answered, mischievously. "I don't fancy partridges very much."

"But I shot them myself."

"They are partridges all the same, are they not?"

"Certainly; but all partridges are not the same. These

are particularly fat and well flavored. I got them in the deepest part of the wood where there is nothing but the wildest kind of food for them. That improves the flavor."

"I could never tell any difference."

"Not if you never ate them, of course; but I hope you will try them for my sake."

"Take what I don't like because you ask me to! Nonsense!"

She did not really mean this, but felt in a teasing mood that night and wanted to provoke him.

"You are not very gracious," he replied, petulantly. "I think I'm not wanted. Good-night."

He was turning to go when old Duval's voice was heard outside in loud and angry tones.

He had been off buying cattle and had just returned, whip in hand, and being tired and hungry, was not in a particularly happy frame of mind.

At any other time the sight of the birds which Howard had thrown upon the table would have delighted him; but now he was cross, and disposed to pick a quarrel with every one.

"Who's been tramping through the house with muddy boots, leaving a parcel o' nasty birds right on the clean table?" he grumbled. "Some o' them silly beaux of Marian's, I suppose. Why the mischief can't she take one of 'em and tell the rest to clear out? She's old enough to know her own mind, I fancy."

He pushed the birds upon the floor, knocked down Howard's gun, which he had put away carefully in a corner, and then shying his hat at the poor cat, who, disturbed by the falling gun, had got her back up, and was spitting at the inoffensive article, strode toward the sitting-room.

"So you've got two of 'em, have ye?" he roared, upon seeing the brothers. "Fine goings on, tramping about the house spoiling everything, and littering up the place with dirty traps. Why don't ye make one of 'em come to the point, you silly jade, and not go fooling 'em both in——"

Marian blushed scarlet, and Howard advancing a pace, said, angrily:

"For shame, sir, to speak to your daughter that way. You ought to have better manners."

"Who is it dares to talk manners to me in my own house?" roared the irate man, raising his whip over his head.

As he glared at Howard, the latter clenched his teeth, and advanced, Marian trying to restrain him, while Robert had also arisen in order to prevent a quarrel, if possible.

Robert was favorite with the old man, and he tried to smooth matters over.

"Ye white livered puppy!" roared old Duval. "I've a mind to lash ye as I would a surly dog! Talk to me of manners, indeed!"

"I see it is useless," answered Howard, "for you don't know anything about them."

"Howard—for Heaven's sake, don't say any more!" said Robert. "Don't mind him, Mr. Duval—he is hasty, and you, perhaps, were a little quick——"

"Is it you, too, that abuses me to my own face, in my own house?" he shrieked, turning the full current of his wrath upon Robert.

He struck at the young man with his whip, and made a livid mark across his face.

Quick as a flash Howard, enraged at the insult offered to his brother, bounded forward, throwing aside Marian's detaining hand, and delivered a sledge-hammer blow full in Duval's face, which floored him.

The old man struck his head against an antique side-board and cut a bad gash in his forehead, which rendered him insensible.

Poor Marion gave one glance at his white, upturned face, with the red line across the forehead, and uttering a piercing shriek, fainted.

"I am obliged to you, Howard," said Robert, quietly, "for your zeal in my favor, but I am sorry this thing has happened."

Then he bent down to see what he could do for the old man, while Howard replied:

"Do you think I would see that brute strike you and not repay the insult? If he were a younger man I could have his blood."

"No, no! Don't say that!"

"The miserable dastard! Come away; this house is no place for us. If yon coquette wants a husband, let her seek elsewhere than in the family of the Van Dams. She is unworthy to enter it."

Marian recovered as these words were uttered, and seeing Howard leave the room, knew at once that her chances in that direction were hopeless.

"If you will call assistance, Miss Duval, I will take my leave," said Robert. "I wish to see your father properly provided for, but after that I must depart forever."

"Oh, Robert, Robert, you, too, are not false? Say you forgive him!"

"I cannot remain here after the insult I have received," said Robert, calmly, "and cannot ally myself with any one who claims kinship with such a brute. If I ever said aught which can be construed into protestations of love, consider it as unsaid."

The poor girl buried her face in her hands and wept.

Some one entered, and the old man showing signs of recovery, Robert left the house never to enter it again.

Old Duval was sick for a week, and was as savage as a man well could be, which greatly interfered with his speedy recovery.

He threatened to prosecute Howard Van Dam for assault, but recollecting that by so doing he would be laying himself open to an action on the same ground, brought by Robert, he concluded that it was best to say nothing about it.

Neither of the brothers came near the house after that, and soon an incident occurred which threw the whole neighborhood into an intense excitement.

This was no less than the finding, one morning, of the dead body of Robert Van Dam in the woods, with every indication that he had been murdered.

Then the old man came forward and said that he had heard the brothers quarreling the night before, and that Howard had threatened to kill Robert.

Later in the evening he had seen a man answering to the description of Howard, emerging from the wood with a gun in his hand, still smoking.

He accused the young man the next day of having shot his brother, and Howard was arrested.

There was no evidence but that of the old man, and this was purely circumstantial.

The body had been quickly buried, and but few saw it, those who did, however, swearing positively that it was that of Robert Van Dam.

Howard was placed upon trial, and the old man swore so clearly that he had heard Howard swear to kill Robert, and had afterward seen him come from the very wood where the latter's body was found, that the jury were almost prepared to convict him in their seats.

I had become interested in the case, and prepared a surprise for all concerned, and I will now proceed to relate how it happened.

The prisoner had been sitting all this time with his head bowed, not once looking up, as if overcome with grief.

"The two brothers were very much alike, were they not?" asked the attorney for the defense.

"Yes; they were twins."

"Scarcely to be told apart?"

"If they had both shaved close you could scarcely tell them one from the other."

"Robert had a scar across his face made by a blow from a whip, had he not?"

The old man turned scarlet while the witness answered in the affirmative.

"Has any one described such a scar as appearing on the face of the dead body?"

The testimony was read; no one had mentioned it.

"Did you see the body?"

"Yes."

"Did you see the scar?"

"I don't remember. I think perhaps—very likely I did," stammered the witness, the old man looking him in the face.

"Answer me, yes or no."

"I think I did."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You know the body was that of Robert Van Dam?"

"Yes."

"You would swear to it?"

"Yes."

"Will you please look at the prisoner's face a moment?"

The prisoner here raised his head and the witness looked at him.

There was an immediate sensation.

Across the prisoner's face was a vivid, scarlet mark, as if it had been branded with a hot iron.

"Robert Van Dam himself!" broke from every throat.

"You say you are positive the body was that of Robert Van Dam?"

"I thought so."

"You said you knew it was. Who is this man?"

"He looks like Robert."

"Prisoner at the bar, what is your name?" said the judge.

"Howard Van Dam."

"You see, your honor," said the attorney, "the witness cannot tell one from the other."

If the prisoner were Howard, he certainly looked like Robert, for he was clean shaven and the very image of the man said to have been murdered.

"I have one more witness," continued the lawyer. "Show him in."

A door was opened and a man entered and stood in front of the prisoner.

"Howard Van Dam!" muttered one.

The prisoner was sworn.

"What is your name?"

"Robert Van Dam!"

"Supposed to have been murdered?"

"Yes."

"Explain the mystery of your strange appearance."

The man suddenly put his hands to his face, removed a pair of false whiskers, passed a handkerchief across his cheeks, and stood revealed—Robert Van Dam!

The scar was seen upon his face, and no one could doubt his identity.

The prisoner at the bar produced a dampened cloth, and erased the scar upon his face, showing at once that some deception had been practiced.

"The charge of murder cannot be sustained, your honor," said the lawyer, "as both brothers are here. You see what metal the witnesses for the prosecution are made of. Robert Van Dam is not and never has been dead."

"And so far from brother attacking me," said Robert, "there is the villain," pointing to old Duval, "who tried to take his life."

"As to the quarrel he says we had together, there never was one. My brother and myself never quarrel. I saw that man shoot at my brother and leave him for dead on the ground.

"Horried beyond measure, I fell in a faint, and was found unconscious in the morning, suffering from a bad bruise on the head.

"Instantly that old villain accused my brother of having murdered me. Howard knew not who his assailant was, but having mercifully escaped death, was arrested.

"I discovered the plot against my brother, and hoodwinked the officer by having the dead body of a tramp found in the woods identified as myself.

"The plan was conceived of each of us looking like the other, and it has succeeded so well that any one here would have sworn I was Howard and he was I.

"I accuse the witnesses for the prosecution, including Duval, of perjury; and I accuse him of attempting my brother's life!"

There was an instant hubbub in the court-room, which the officers tried in vain to quell.

In the midst of it there was heard the report of a pistol, followed by a heavy fall.

Instantly all was silence.

Old Duval, overcome with shame, had taken his own life, and now lay dead.

Poor Marian was at home when his body was brought in, and when she learned of his perfidy—for such things travel fast—she swooned.

Her reason left her, and the brothers witnessed the melancholy spectacle of a shattered mind, and saw her removed to an asylum, where she soon after died.

Then it was learned that old Duval had long intended to ruin both brothers, and had paid men to swear falsely.

He had not expected the affair to turn out as it did, and overcome with shame and a guilty conscience, had acted the coward's part by taking his own life.

The brothers left the town never to return, and in a round of business and pleasure tried hard to forget the sad occurrences which had followed so swiftly upon each other.

They journeyed over the world together, but there was always something to remind them of poor Marian, and at last they entered the armies of some foreign power, fought side by side, and in a desperate encounter with the enemy, where both displayed the highest bravery, were slain at the very moment of victory.

They were buried with all honor, and at last the brothers in name, in love, and in fortune, found rest and tranquility.

ROMANCE AND REALITY.

I'm not going to tell tales out of school, so I don't mean to let you into the secret of the whereabouts of as pretty a little village as is to be found in all the country. But what I will tell you is, that it is not ten miles off; that there is a railway station, and that a lot of smart young fellows come down by the five o'clock express every day; and that, within an hour after, some dozen dinner-bells ring across the common, which is dotted with the prettiest cottages and villas you can imagine, each one hidden in forests of flowers and shrubbery, so that the place seems like a little fairy bower, designed expressly for "Titania" herself, fastidious though she may be.

But the girls, the dear, sweet girls, so delicate and refined in their manner, and yet so full of mirth and joy, ever ready for fun or other innocent sport! Surrounded by the most picturesque scenery, they have imbibed a deep love of romance, and it is no uncommon thing to find a young and pretty lassie seated upon the stump of some old king of the forest—for once upon a time our common was a forest—absorbed in the pages of the last new tale, and lost to all the world beside.

There is not a beau in the village but is a painter or a poet, or who dotes on Byron, Burns, and Shelley; nor a young lady but can scribble rhymes as fast as she can write. Yes; I forgot—there is one, and that one the daughter of Farmer Blake, or the Squire, as folks here call him.

Nelly Blake is a gay, laughing, airy being, with eyes as black as midnight, that dance and sparkle with mirth. She is an ardent admirer of the beautiful, but scorns all mock sentimentality. Frank Parker, the doctor's only son, would have proposed for Nelly long ago, if she had been less matter-of-fact. For Frank himself shares the common weakness, and was at one time terribly romantic.

"Oh, dear," sighed Frank to his friend, Tom Hunter, "if she only had soul I should worship her; but there's no driving an atom of romance into her head. She never even trembled, the other day, when I offered to cross that rickety pole over the creek at Hutton's mill-dam; she didn't even turn pale, but said when I went to help her:

"Thank you, Mr. Parker, but I can cross better alone," and before I could speak she was over, and I left alone on the bank; and, to cap the whole, I dared not follow! I would have tumbled her in the brook if I could!"

"Why don't you get a spirited horse?" said Hunter; "ask her to take a ride in your phaeton, and then upset her, so as to sprain that snowy wrist or delicate ankle of hers? Then rush to the rescue. That would make her romantic, if anything would."

"A capital idea!" cried Frank, deceived by his friend's gravity; "I'll do it at once."

And, without another word, he rose and left the room.

Hunter laughed till the tears came; then he said:

"But it will never do to let Nelly go without warning. I'll write her a note, and let her accept or refuse, as she pleases. My word for it, she'll prove a match for him, anyhow."

Nelly was busily engaged upon a piece of delicate embroidery, when her little brother came running in with Hunter's note. Scarcely had she perused it, when Frank's trap, drawn by two magnificent horses, dashed up to the door, and in an instant our romantic friend sprang upon the ground.

Nelly settled upon her course of action in an instant, and when Frank invited her to ride, accepted, her laughing eyes dropped to the floor, hidden by their jet black lashes.

Soon Nell was equipped. She looked so sweetly with her little white treasure of an "Exhibition" sailor's hat set so coquettishly on her dark curls, that Frank was delighted. In a moment he had her by his side, and her tongue was rattling away about everything except poetry. Frank all this time was holding on his own side very tightly himself; but if he had looked he would have found Nell was holding on as tightly as he was. Of course he did not really mean to hurt Nelly very much; he only desired to make her a little nervous, and at the same time eternally grateful to him for saving her life.

After a short drive, Frank became enthusiastic about the beauties of Nature. They entered the pretty road to Appleton.

"What noble old oaks," said Frank; "how they wave their majestic heads——"

He was interrupted by a smothered laugh from Nell, who was determined to cross him in every romantic idea.

"Why, dear me, Mr. Parker," she said, "these are every one sycamores, and not one over ten years old."

Frank bit his lip, and replied:

"I mean those yonder," pointing to some short oaks; Nell muttered something about "worms falling on one's neck;" in short, she opposed his every remark; mossy banks had slugs and ants in them, and moonlight evenings were cold and chilly. If there was a comet, she did not know, but she would look out of the window for it.

Frank was thoroughly provoked, as Nell took care that he should be.

"Shall we drive around the lake, Miss Blake?"

Nell laughed at the chance rhyme, and looking up in his face with her sweetest smile, answered:

"Oh, yes, Frank, by all means. Are those swans?" pointing to some ducks and ducklings that were swimming

on the pond, once the old gravel-pit, by the side of the common, which Frank honored by the name of lake.

Her question was asked in such a sweet yet ironical manner, that it brought the color to his cheek, and as he was really angry, he cared nothing for the risk he would himself run by tipping over the carriage; so, giving a sudden and powerful turn to his whip, he brought it down hard upon the startled horses, and in an instant Mr. Frank Parker landed just where he had intended Miss Nelly Blake to go—namely, up to his neck in the duck pond.

The horses dashed off at a furious rate, but Nelly soon checked their speed, and, managing to drive directly around the pond, came trotting gayly up to the place of the mishap. Frank by this time had clambered out, and was now perched upon a large log, ruefully endeavoring to wring the water from his dripping clothes. With a very polite bow and, "How d'ye do?" the gay girl jumped upon the ground.

"Bless me, Nelly, let's get home," said the crestfallen hero. "I'll wrap myself up in your thick shawl if you will let me. Are you not frightened?"

"Frightened! no indeed; I enjoy this—it's reality," cried the tantalizing girl; "not a bit of romance in it, is there, Mr. Parker?"

"Oh, no, not an atom of romance in being thrown from your seat and——"

"Landed in the middle of a duck-pond," chimed in Nell; "I think you took a realizing sense of it—I do, indeed; and now it's time to get home, or you will pay dear for this romancing;" and Nell wrapped Frank up in her double thick Tweed shawl, and jumping into the carriage herself, took the reins, as she said: "I dare not trust such wild horses to you."

After a short drive they reached home, Frank thanking his stars that Nelly wasn't romantic or nervous, and thoroughly cured of his romantic notions.

There is to be a wedding. I am invited to it. There is a glorious cake, Nelly's own making. On the top, in the prettiest little roseate letters, is: "Look out for the duck-pond!" Never mind. Nelly is to become Mrs. Parker tomorrow.

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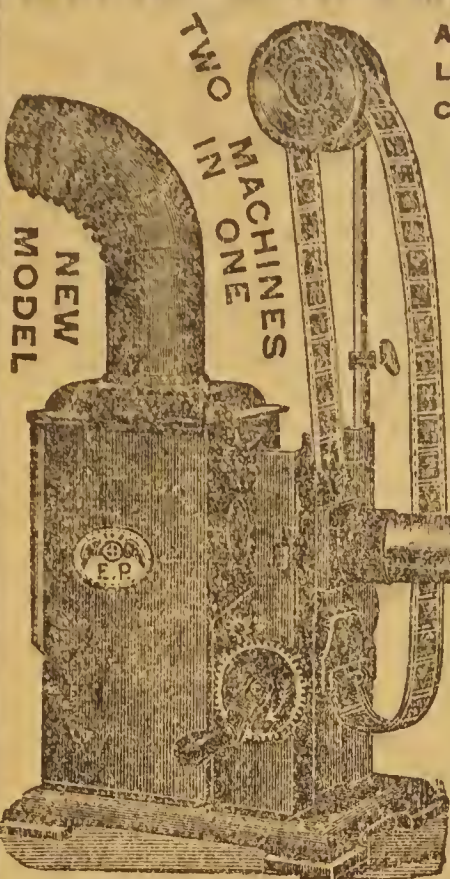


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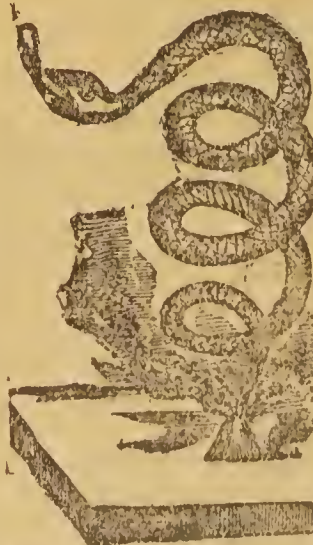
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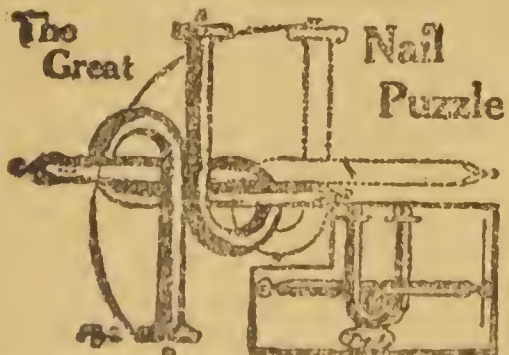
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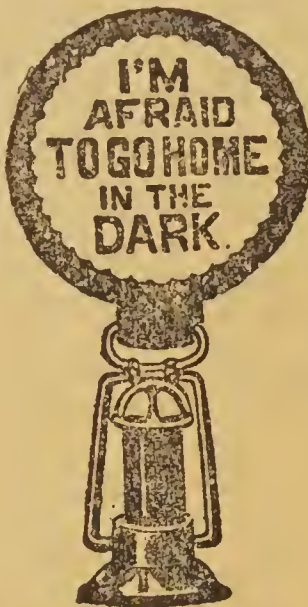
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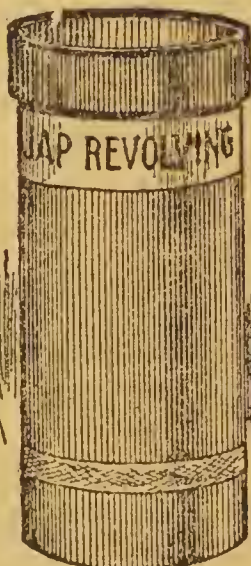
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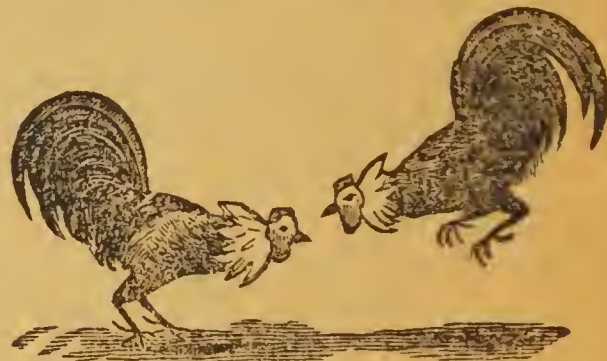
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